NATION

NIA arrests 7th suspect in Red Fort blast case

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BUSINESS

Sensex up 1,022 points; Nifty near record mark

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SPORTS

Under Gambhir, India suffers worst defeat to SA

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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QUOTE of THE DAY

Kyun nahi bolenge...Jai Hind and Vande Mataram are our national slogans. This is our freedom slogan. Jai Hind is our Netaji's slogan... Whoever clashes with it will be smashed to pieces

—MAMATA BANERJEE,
West Bengal CM on RS bulletin, stating that no 'Thanks', 'Jai Hind', 'Vande Mataram' should not be used in the House

Ahmedabad to officially host 2030 Commonwealth Games

GLASGOW, 26 NOV

Ahmedabad was formally awarded hosting rights of the 2030 Commonwealth Games here on Wednesday, paving the way for the multi-sport event's return to India after two decades and giving impetus to the country's audacious plan of becoming an Olympic host in 2036.

Commonwealth Sport's general assembly of 74 members put a seal of approval on India's bid after Ahmedabad was recommended as the proposed host of the centenary edition by its executive board last month. India last hosted the CWG in 2010 in Delhi.

The decision also bolstered India's ambition to be an Olympic host in 2036, which is also proposed to be held in the Gujarat capital.

Ahmedabad has upgraded its sports infrastructure on a war footing in the last one decade to present itself as a sporting hub.

- The decision also bolstered India's ambition to be an Olympic host in 2036, which is also proposed to be held in the Gujarat capital.

India was facing competition from the Nigerian city of Abuja for the 2030 bid.

India had spent close to Rs 70,000 crore to host the 2010 edition of the Games, far exceeding the initial estimate of Rs 1,600 crore and also faced criticism for corruption.

In Delhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya hailed the Games' return to India.

Commonwealth Sport confirmed that 15 to 17 sports will feature at the 2030 Games.

The process to finalise the remainder of the programme will start next month, and the full Centenary Games line-up will be announced next year. PTI

Meanwhile, Reliance Industries is a likely sponsor candidate, as they have a partnership with the Indian Olympic Association. *—PTI*

Delhi ends work from home after 2 days

GRAP-3 removed even as AQI touches 327

A commuter rides a bicycle during a smoggy winter morning at Kartavya Path in New Delhi **PHOTO: PTI**

NEW DELHI, 26 NOV

The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) on Wednesday revoked Stage-3 restrictions under the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) in Delhi-NCR.

Delhi's air quality remained in the "very poor" category for the 13th consecutive day, with the 24-hour average AQI recorded at 327 on Wednesday, down from 352 on Tuesday and 382 on Monday. Real-time data from the Central Pollution Control Board's Sameer app had not updated until 5 pm, though on Tuesday the Rohini station had registered a "severe" AQI of 401. On Monday, 15 stations recorded "severe" readings.

With Stage-3 withdrawn, the mandatory 50 per cent work-from-home requirement for offices has ended, and schools up to Class 5 will no longer operate in hybrid mode, Delhi Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa said on X.

The work from home policy was introduced on 24 November.

Stage-3 curbs had included a ban on non-essential construction and demolition activities, stone crushing and mining, and restrictions on older diesel goods vehicles across the region. These measures have now been lifted.

However, CAQM said actions under Stage-1 and Stage-2 updated in the modified GRAP on 21 November, will remain in force and be strictly monitored to prevent fresh deterioration.

Under Stage-2, BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel four-wheelers continue to be restricted in Delhi, Gurugram, Faridabad, Ghaziabad and Gautam Buddh Nagar. Construction and demolition sites previously shut for violations will not be allowed to resume operations without explicit CAQM approval.

According to the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology's Decision Support System, vehicular emissions contributed 21.6 per cent to Delhi's pollution on Wednesday, the highest among all sources. *—PTI*

Sonia, Rahul & I will end power tussle in K'taka, says Kharge

NEW DELHI, 26 NOV

Amid speculation over leadership change in Karnataka, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said on Wednesday that the issue will be resolved through discussions with Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi.

The tussle within the ruling party intensified recently amid rumours about changing the chief minister after the Congress government reached the halfway mark of its five-year term on 20 November in the context of a "power-sharing" agreement involving Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy CM DK Shivakumar in 2023.

The talk of a tussle in the Congress government in Karnataka has refused to die down, with Siddaramaiah putting the onus on the high command to "end the confusion." Meanwhile, Shivakumar said there was a "secret deal between 5 to 6 of us" on the issue of sharing power.

Responding to a question about legislators backing Shivakumar going to New Delhi, Siddaramaiah had said on Tuesday, "Let them go. Ultimately, the high command will decide." Shivakumar, who is also the state Congress chief, said on Tuesday that he doesn't want to speak on the matter in public as there was a "secret deal" between "five to six of us." *—PTI*

>>>More on Pages 2 & 3

Felt unwell: CJI mulls virtual hearings amid smog

NEW DELHI, 26 NOV

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Wednesday said he felt unwell after an hour-long morning walk amid Delhi's hazardous air and is considering shifting Supreme Court hearings to a fully virtual mode. He said a decision would be taken after consulting the bar, with a suggestion also raised to allow virtual hearings for lawyers above 60.

The remarks came while hearing petitions challenging the Election Commission's Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in several states. Senior lawyer Rakesh Dwivedi, appearing for the EC, sought exemption from physical presence, citing congestion after his walk. Kapil Sibal agreed, noting that "at our age, we are breathing obnoxious air with AQI at 400–500." *—PTI*

Class 10 student delivers baby in Koppal hostel

KOPPAL, 26 NOV

A shocking case from Kukanur taluk has sparked widespread outrage after a 16-year-old Class 10 student staying at the Pre-Matric Girls' Hostel delivered a baby boy on the hostel premises.

The delivery reportedly occurred inside the compound, raising serious concerns about negligence and the failure of hostel staff to detect the girl's pregnancy. *—Salar News*

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Couple behind fake 'Nandini Ghee' racket held

BENGALURU, 26 NOV

The police have arrested a man and his wife, the kingpins behind the fake 'Nandini' ghee racket, days after the racket was uncovered. The couple, Shivakumar and Ramya, ran a manufacturing unit that produced counterfeit ghee under the 'Nandini' brand, owned by the Karnataka Co-operative Milk Producers' Federation (KMF). *—Salar News*

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Identify Manuwadis: CM on Constitution Day

Citizens take part in a Constitution Day rally from Vidhana Soudha to Ambedkar Bhava in Bengaluru on Wednesday **PHOTO: MOHAMMAD ASAD**

BENGALURU, 26 NOV

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday called upon people to identify "anti-constitutional Manuwadis" who favour the 'Manusmriti' over the Constitution.

Inaugurating the 'Constitution Day Celebration – 2025' here, Siddaramaiah warned that an "unwritten Manusmriti" governed the country before BR Ambedkar's Constitution came into force.

Manuwadis are those who believe in 'Manusmriti' (ancient Indian text based on Hindu tradition)

Building an equal society and eliminating inequality is the aspiration of our Constitution and Ambedkar, he said.

Siddaramaiah reminded the gathering that "we the people of INDIA" is the basic mantra of the Constitution.

According to him, the Constitution was approved after a comprehensive discussion in the Constituent Assembly for a year about what kind of Constitution the people of this country need.

"Federal, unitary, written, non-written Constitutions are there in the world. Ours is a written Constitution. No other country has as many castes and religions as our country. Therefore, Ambedkar gave a Constitution that is acceptable to this land," he said,

Siddaramaiah emphasised that Ambedkar's deep understanding of the caste system and its dangers led him to incorporate the provision of reservation.

He noted that even after reformers like Basavanna fought against the caste system, the upper caste people are not letting go of caste.

Siddarmaiah said the caste will weaken only when the lower caste achieves economic power. *—PTI*

Examining it: India on B'desh's plea to extradite Hasina

NEW DELHI, 26 NOV

India said on Wednesday it is examining a request by Bangladesh's interim government to extradite former prime minister Sheikh Hasina, stressing its "commitment to the best interests of the Bangladeshi people".

Bangladesh had earlier sought Hasina's extradition, but received "no reply," according to Foreign Affairs Adviser M Touhid Hossain. He noted the situation is now "different" as Hasina, 78, was last week sentenced to death in absentia by a special tribunal in Dhaka for "crimes against humanity" linked to her government's crackdown on student-led protests last year. Hasina has been living in India since fleeing Bangladesh on August 5, 2024. Former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal was also sentenced to death on similar charges.

Hossain said Bangladesh expects a response from India, though it may not come immediately. Following the verdict, Dhaka sent an official letter requesting Hasina's extradition under the existing bilateral treaty.

External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said India is examining the request "as part of ongoing judicial and internal legal processes" and remains committed to peace, democracy, inclusion and stability in Bangladesh. He also confirmed that an invitation from Bangladesh National Security Advisor Khalilur Rahman for his Indian counterpart Ajit Doval to visit Dhaka will be taken up in due course. *—PTI*

Cabinet approves Rs 7,280 cr rare earth magnets scheme

NEW DELHI, 26 NOV

The government on Wednesday approved a Rs 7,280-crore scheme to promote domestic manufacturing of sintered rare earth permanent magnets (REPMs), aiming to reduce India's heavy dependence on China for these critical components.

Rare earth magnets are essential for electric vehicles, renewable energy systems, electronics, aerospace and defence applications. The scheme, cleared at a Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, will support setting up integrated manufacturing facilities covering the entire chain, from converting rare earth oxides to metals, metals to alloys, and finally to finished magnets.

The programme proposes allocating a total capacity of 6,000 MTPA to five beneficiaries through a global competitive bidding process, with each allowed to set up up to 1,200 MTPA. The scheme will run for seven years, including a two-year gestation period for plant establishment and five years of incentives on sales.

The package includes Rs 6,450 crore in sales-linked incentives and Rs 750 crore in capital subsidy. Restrictions imposed by China have caused global shortages, affecting sectors such as automobiles and electronics, prompting India to explore collaborations with countries like Australia and Japan. India currently requires 4,000–5,000 MTPA of rare earth magnets and has an estimated 6.9 tonnes of rare earth reserves.. *—PTI*

CLEAN CHIT AFTER 3 YRS

Chitradurga mutt seer acquitted in POCSO case

CHITRADURGA, 26 NOV

The District and Sessions Court here acquitted all three accused, including Murugha Mutt seer Shivamurthy Murugha Sharana, in a POCSO case on Wednesday.

Judge Gangadharappa Hadapad delivered the verdict, giving complete relief to Shivamurthy Murugha Sharana, Rashmi, and Paramashivaiah.

The final arguments were heard on 18 November, and the verdict was reserved by the judge.

Senior advocate CV Nagesh for the seer, while the prosecution presented its case through the public prosecutor.

- The case had grabbed public attention, leading to multiple rounds of investigation by the police, arrest of the seer, and allegations against individuals connected to the Mutt.

This POCSO case against the Murugha Mutt seer was registered in August 2022, after two minor girls from an institution associated with the Matha alleged sexual harassment and exploitation.

The case had grabbed statewide public attention, leading to multiple rounds of investigation by the police, arrest of the seer, and parallel allegations involving individuals connected to the Murugha Matha's administration wing.

During the trial, statements of the complainants, witnesses, and police officials involved in the investigation were recorded by the court.

The defence team consistently argued that the allegations in the POCSO case were fabricated due to internal disputes within the Mutt. The prosecution, however, maintained that the charges against the accused were serious and supported by the victims' accounts. *—PTI*

SC: Can't challenge SIR just because it is not done before

NEW DELHI, 26 NOV

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said the argument that a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls has never been conducted before cannot be used to challenge the legality of the Election Commission's (EC) decision to undertake the exercise in several states.

Commencing final hearings on multiple petitions questioning the validity of the SIR, a bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi said the EC has the "inherent power to determine correctness of entry in Form 6", the form required for voter registration. The bench rejected submissions suggesting the EC must accept Form 6 entries without scrutiny.

Justice Bagchi said Form 6 does not bind the EC to accept entries without verification and emphasised the need to remove deceased voters.

"You are saying the EC is a post office," the CJI said.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal responded, "Prima facie, yes... unless there is contrary material." The bench, however, stressed that the EC has constitutional jurisdiction to verify documents. *—PTI*

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PHOTO: ANI

Parameshwara should become CM: Dalit bodies

BELAGAVI, 26 NOV

Following the protest in Tumakuru with demands for a Dalit Chief Minister in Karnataka, Home Minister G Parameshwara declined to make any comments. Dalit organisations have demanded that Parameshwara be made Chief Minister. Parameshwara said, "I don't want to speak anything related to CM, specifically related to the CM post and cabinet reshuffle issue. I have already spoken much." A protest was held in front of the Dr B R Ambedkar statue on Tuesday. The protest was led by Dalit leaders Ramaiah, Bande Kumar, and Bhanuprakash. On Sunday, Parameshwara on Sunday implied that he is also in the Chief Ministerial race. *—ANI*

50 Mysuru women to get free cancer surgeries

MYSURU, 26 NOV

The Bharath Hospital and Institute of Oncology (BHIO), in partnership with Automotive Axle Ltd, has launched the 'Nari Swasthi' project to provide free breast cancer surgeries for 50 underprivileged women. The initiative will fully fund surgical treatment for economically disadvantaged patients, ensuring access to high-quality, multidisciplinary care. Announcing the initiative, Automotive Axle Ltd President Nagaraja Gargeshwari said the project aims to support women struggling to afford timely cancer treatment. "It is a collective effort bringing corporates, philanthropists and well-wishers together to assist breast cancer patients who need early intervention but face financial hurdles," he said. Financial support, Superintendent Dr YS Madhavi said, would help reduce drop-outs. *—Salar News*

PM to hold roadshow in Udupi on 28 November

UDUPI, 26 NOV

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will hold a roadshow in Udupi on 28 November, BJP district president Kutyaru Naveen Shetty said. The roadshow will begin at around 11.40am from Narayanaguru Circle in Bannanje and proceed till Kalsanka Junction, Shetty said on Tuesday. He said that cultural performances showcasing coastal Karnataka's traditions, like Yakshagana and tiger dance, will be positioned along the route. People have been asked to be at the Bannanje–Kalsanka road by 10.30am, Shetty said. Modi will later visit Krishna Matha for darshan, attend a 'Laksha Kantha Geeta Parayana' and address a public meeting. Union Minister Pralhad Joshi, BJP state president BY Vijayendra, MPs Kota Srinivas Poojary and Brijesh Chowta, and State leaders are expected to attend. *—PTI*

Jarkiholi declines 'DyCM offer' from DKS

DKS allegedly made the offer during a closed-door meet

HIREKOP RAJAN SAMUEL
BELAGAVI, 26 NOV

CM Siddaramaiah; PwD Minister Satish Jarkiholli; DyCM DK Shivakumar

PHOTOS: MOHAMMAD ASAD/X

Power-sharing tensions within the Karnataka Congress appear to have escalated following a confidential meeting between Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar and Public Works Minister Satish Jarkiholi at a private hotel in Bengaluru on Tuesday night.

According to reliable sources, Shivakumar purportedly proposed that Jarkiholi be elevated to the posts of Deputy Chief Minister and KPCC President if he backed efforts to replace Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. However, Jarkiholi is said to have rejected the proposal, stating that such a move was "not possible."

The government recently marked two-and-a-half-years in office, with speculations peaking over a potential change at the top. Many have cited a "power sharing" agreement between Shivakumar and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and dubbed the period as "November Revolution".

Against this backdrop, the closed-door meeting between the two influential leaders has drawn intense political attention.

Shivakumar reportedly urged Jarkiholi to persuade Siddaramaiah to step aside, assuring him that the administration would thereafter function under "collective leadership." In return, he promised to recommend Jarkiholi for the key party and government posts before the High Command, sources said.

Jarkiholi is believed to have declined to intervene against the Chief Minister, saying: "We cannot take such a stance. We will convey the discussion to the Chief Minister, and we will act as per the instructions of the High Command."

Meanwhile, Jarkiholi dismissed rumours of a leadership change while speaking to the media in Bengaluru.

"There is no discussion on replacing the Chief Minister," he said. "Shivakumar also has ambitions, and so do many others. But as of now, there is absolutely no talk of change."

The Minister also told reporters that he would soon seek time from Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge to meet him.

Jarkiholi added that Siddaramaiah has repeatedly said that the High Command should end the issue at the earliest. "When CM says it, then seniors in the party should take note of it."

Regarding Home Minister G Parameshwara's claim that he should also be made the CM, the Public Works Minister said Parameshwara had served as party president for five years. "There is nothing wrong in making such claims. So he too is senior but who will decide finally? It happens in Delhi. All that we can do is just make a claim". *—Salar News*

200% SURE DKS WILL BECOME CM: RAMANAGARA MLA

Ramanagara MLA Iqbal Hussain said he is 200 per cent sure that DK Shivakumar will become the Chief Minister soon. Hussain had travelled to New Delhi to meet the High Command. "200 per cent, he will become the CM soon. The High Command will decide. As our leader (Shivakumar) said, the transfer of power is a secret deal among five to six party leaders, and those five to six people will decide," he said.

Priyank plays down his meeting with Rahul Gandhi

BENGALURU, 26 NOV

- Priyank said that Rahul was interested in the recently launched AI computer and called for the meet. He dismissed reports that he was delivering messages to CM, DyCM

Minister Priyank Kharge on Wednesday played down reports that said he has held discussions with top Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on the leadership change issue in the State and has conveyed the latter's message to CM Siddaramaiah and Deputy CM DK Shivakumar.

Maintaining that the Congress High Command will decide and give clarity on the issue of CM change, Priyank said he met Rahul to explain about KEO (Knowledge-driven, Economical, Open-source), an AI-ready personal computer, that was launched during the recent Bengaluru tech summit, and to discuss on "vote chori" cases in the state.

According to reports, Priyank had conveyed Rahul's message to both Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar, and that they are likely to be called to New Delhi soon.

"Discussions are in the media, will I meet Mohan Bhagwat (RSS chief) if not Rahul Gandhi? Will I report to Keshava Krupa (RSS state headquarters) without reporting to CM and Deputy CM on my meeting? Rahul Gandhi was invited for the Bengaluru Tech Summit, he couldn't come. I had sought his time to show our Artificial Intelligence Personal Computer," Priyank said.

Priyank said that Rahul was curious about the AI personal computer.

The Minister ruled out any confusion in the party on the leadership issue, pointing out that everyone including the CM, Deputy CM, AICC Chief Mallikarjun Kharge and ministers have consistently said that the party High Command will decide on the matter.

Priyank also termed talks of Mallikarjun as the Chief Minister was "irrelevant".

Meanwhile, Shivakumar on Wednesday said, "I don't want to speak about anything in the media. We will discuss the party's issues in the four walls."

When asked about his Delhi visit, Shivakumar said he wants to finalise candidates for four MLC seats. "I wanted to reorganise the KPCC trust and our properties." *—Agencies*

Call for election if you can't stop fighting, BJP to CM

BENGALURU, 26 NOV

The Opposition BJP on Wednesday indicated Chief Minister Siddaramaiah should resign and declare election if his party is not able to put an end to the ongoing power tussle.

BJP said the issue is affecting people in distress, especially the farming community that has been on strike for the past one month. Their problem has not been solved yet.

Addressing reporters press, BJP State President BY Vijayendra said the ruling Congress should come to Belagavi for the Legislative Session starting from 8 December with more clarity as to who should be the CM of the State.

"When farmers are in distress and are seeking answer and compensation from the State government, they (Congress) should come to Belagavi with proper compensation package for the them," he said. "Let them postpone the session or if they are unable to handle the situation, resign and declare the election."

Meanwhile, LoP in the Legislative Council, Chalavadi Narayanaswamy said that "Siddaramaiah is a total blackmailer. He came from outside (JD(S)) and blackmailed the High Command."

BJP leader and MLA Mahesh Tenginkai said the power fight was hurting development works in the State. *—Agencies*

'D'sthala SIT should protect witnesses'

BENGALURU, 26 NOV

Representatives of 'Kondavaru Yaaru: Who Killed the Women in Dharmasthala' met Pranab Mohanty, the Chief of the SIT which probed the mass burial allegations on Wednesday and submitted a memorandum, urging the government to protect witnesses.

The representatives were part of a campaign launched to demand for justice for the deaths and disappearances in the temple town.

"A systematic investigation was required to answer some fundamental questions; The unnaturally high numbers of unnatural deaths in the region; Why police investigations into these deaths, disappearances and rapes have been consistently shoddy and half hearted; Why the disappearances and unexplained deaths of witnesses have not been investigated," the letter said. *—Salar News*

Class 10 student delivers baby in Koppal hostel

KOPPAL, 26 NOV

A shocking case from in Kukanur taluk has sparked widespread outrage after a 16-year-old Class 10 student staying at the Pre-Matric Girls' Hostel delivered a baby boy on the hostel premises.

The delivery reportedly occurred inside the compound, raising serious concerns about negligence and the failure of hostel staff to detect the girl's pregnancy.

Following the incident, the minor and her newborn were shifted to the Women and Children's Hospital in Koppal.

Both are reported to be stable and under medical supervision.

However, the major question being raised is how the hostel staff failed to notice that a 16-year-old girl was visibly pregnant.

Koppal Deputy Commissioner Suresh Itnal and District Superintendent of Police Dr Ram L Arasidddi visited the hospital and ordered a detailed probe. Kukanur Police have registered a POCSO case and arrested a 23-year-old accused youth.

State Commission for Protection of Child Rights Chairperson Dr Shashidhar Kosambe said the incident reflects a collective failure of the school and hostel system. "Such incidents are unacceptable. Strict action will be taken against negligent staff," he told Salar News, directing officials to ensure medical care and rehabilitation.

Authorities have suspended six officials, including the hostel superintendent, teachers and two medical officers linked to the case. *— Salar News*

FARMERS SAY BENGALURU CHALO

Thousands of farmers, workers, women, youth, and landless poor protested at Bengaluru's Freedom Park on Wednesday. Samyukta Horata Karnataka, a body of farmers, daily-wage workers and labourers has called for 'Bengaluru Chalo' stir to protest 15 critical issues, including land rights, farm loans, minimum wages, social security, employment, SC/ST fund use, women's safety, and alcohol prohibition ***PHOTO: MOHAMMAD ASAD***

Konkani author Sail to get Kuvempu Award

BENGALURU, 26 NOV

Mahabaleshwar Sail, a renowned Konkani writer, has been selected for the 'Kuvempu National Award – 2025.'

Born on 4 August, 1943, at Shejebag, a village in the Majali region of Karnataka's Uttara Kannada district, Sail later served in the Army and took part in the 1965 Indo-Pak War. He also served in the UN Peacekeeping Force on the IsraelEgypt border during 1964-1965. After his military service, he worked in the Postal Department until retirement.

Sail writes primarily in Konkani and Marathi.

His first Konkani novel, 'Kaali Ganga,' was published in 1996. It focused on the lives of farmers along the Kali River in Karwar.

Many of his short stories and novels have been translated into English and Hindi.

The novel, 'Adrusht' was adapted into the critically acclaimed film 'Paltadcho Munis' in 2009.

He was honoured by the Central Sahitya Akademi with the Saraswati Samman (2016) for his novel 'Hawthan.'

The Kuvempu Award carries a cash prize of Rs 5,00,000 and a silver medal.

The ceremony will be held at Kuppali on Kuvempu's birth anniversary 29 December. *—Salar News*

Drunk friends hack Mysuru youth to death

MYSURU, 26 NOV

A 19-year-old youth was hacked to death early on Wednesday at Shanti Nagar in Mysuru. Sayyed Sofian was murdered by his friends. The crime was captured on CCTV. The incident occurred when the youth arrived to have tea with friends. Sayyed was a resident of Gowsiyanagar in Narasimharaja.

Police said that two friends of Sayyed Sofian hacked him to death after a fight.

Sayyed's mother Shaheen Taj said her son was murdered by his friends who had consumed alcohol and drugs. She asked the police to conduct a detailed probe as there was rampant sale of drugs in her area. Police are on the hunt for the accused. *—Salar News*

Couple behind fake 'Nandini Ghee' racket held

BENGALURU, 26 NOV

The police have arrested a man and his wife, the kingpins behind the fake 'Nandini' ghee racket, days after the racket was uncovered.

The couple, Shivakumar and Ramya, ran a manufacturing unit that produced counterfeit ghee under the 'Nandini' brand, owned by the Karnataka Co-operative Milk Producers' Federation (KMF).

A Central Crime Branch (CCB) raid uncovered large, high-tech machinery used to manufacture the adulterated product on an industrial scale. Authorities said the equipment, together with raw materials and stock, has been seized. Four other men linked to the racket had been arrested earlier.

Investigations began after suspicious supply patterns prompted KMF vigilance checks. On 14 November, a joint team from the CCB Special Investigation Squad and KMF Vigilance Wing tracked the operation to godowns and shops tied to Krishna Enterprises in Chamarajpet's Nanjamba Agrahara, believed to be the supply hub.

Police intercepted a vehicle transporting adulterated packed ghee from Tamil Nadu and seized assets worth Rs 1.26 crore, including 8,136 litres of spurious ghee.

Tests are underway to determine whether animal fat was used. Further probe is underway. *—Agencies*

POOR SAFETY MEASURES

Authorities seize 25 buses for not paying road tax

KOLAR, 26 NOV

In a major swoop on erring private buses driving on National Highways, transport authorities on Wednesday intercepted high-end multi-axle buses on the Bengaluru-Chennai National Highway and seized 25 vehicles. The buses had tourist permits in North Indian and North Eastern states, but were running on a regular basis in Karnataka without paying the required State road tax. Authorities are in the process of cracking down on road tax.

The operation began early in the day with the Joint Transport Commissioner Gayathri Devi and Kolar Regional Transport Officer Venugopala Reddy M intercepting vehicles and checking documents and safety measures.

Many of the buses seized from along the Bengaluru-Chennai National Highway had tourist permits for Northern and North-Eastern states but had not paid the Karnataka road tax ***PHOTO: SALAR***

Devi said it was brought to her notice that many buses were plying on regular routes without paying the stipulated State road tax, which is why she ordered the probe.

Most of the vehicles lacked basic safety measures such as an emergency door, or the hammer needed to open the emergency door.

Authorities booked such buses, said sources in the Transport Department.

Venugopala said that overall, 28 buses were intercepted at various points including Nangali on the Karnataka-Andhra Pradesh border. About 25 buses were found to have not paid the State road tax.

He said different types of buses are taxed differently. This ranges between Rs 1.50 lakhs to Rs 3.00 lakhs. Authorities are in the process of calculating the same for the seized buses depending on the seating capacity of the buses and their type.

COMMUTERS HIT

As the authorities seized the buses, commuters who had booked their seats in these luxury buses were inconvenienced. Some of them expressed their ire at the authorities. However, Transport Department authorities made alternate arrangements for their onward journey by roping in KSRTC buses. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: ANI

41 Naxalites surrender in Chhattisgarh

BIJAPUR, 26 NOV

Forty-one Naxalites, including 32 carrying a collective bounty of Rs 1.19 crore, surrendered in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur on Wednesday, police said. The cadres, among them 12 women, cited the state's revised surrender policy and the Bastar police's 'Poona Margham' reintegration drive. Those who gave up arms included PLGA battalion members, area committee leaders, militia commanders and cadres linked to Dandakaranya, Telangana and Dhamtari-Gariaband-Nuapada divisions. Police said the group pledged faith in the Constitution and received Rs 50,000 each as immediate assistance. Senior officer Jitendra Kumar Yadav urged remaining Maoists to renounce violence. Over 2,200 have surrendered statewide in 23 months, officials said. *—PTI*

Pakistan navy tests anti-ship ballistic missile

KARACHI, 26 NOV

The Pakistani Navy has successfully tested an indigenously developed ship-launched anti-ship ballistic missile, the military said. A statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), said the test was conducted on Tuesday "from a locally produced naval platform." The missile is capable of striking both sea and land targets with high accuracy, the ISPR said, adding that it is equipped with advanced guidance technology and enhanced manoeuvrability features. President Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee General Sahir Shamshad Mirza, and the Services Chiefs extended their congratulations to all units, scientists, and engineers involved in the achievement. *—PTI*

Rape accused Rahul to campaign for Kerala Congress

T'PURAM, 26 NOV

Senior Congress leader K Muraleedharan on Wednesday said there was no bar on Palakkad MLA Rahul Mamkootathil campaigning for Congress candidates in the upcoming local body polls. He, however, clarified that Mamkootathil cannot share the stage with party leaders or take part in organisational activities as he remains suspended over sexual misconduct allegations. Responding to questions on whether a suspended MLA should campaign, Muraleedharan said anyone may seek votes for candidates, adding that Mamkootathil was canvassing for those who had supported him earlier. He said the party will act after police complete their probe, and the MLA can move court if the investigation is delayed. *—PTI*

Haryana cuts 40 trees to build road for new BJP office

NEW DELHI, 26 NOV

The Supreme Court on Wednesday sharply criticised the Haryana government for uprooting 40 fully-grown trees to build an access road to a newly constructed BJP office in Karnal, calling the act "pathetic". A bench of Justices JB Pardiwala and KV Viswanathan sought a detailed explanation and a remedial plan, warning the state it would be "taken to task". The court was hearing a plea by 1971 war veteran Col (retd) Davinder Singh Rajput, who challenged the arbitrary allotment of land in a residential area to the BJP and the consequential felling of trees in the adjoining green belt. The bench questioned permissions granted and asked who would compensate for the ecological loss. *—PTI*

On Constitution Day, leaders urge for unity

Kharge accuses BJP-RSS of damaging the Constitution

NEW DELHI/KARAMSAD, 26 NOV

The Constitution Day, also known as the National Law Day, is celebrated on 26 November every year to mark the adoption of the Constitution of India in 1949. On this day, prominent figures like President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi made an address.

Minister JP Nadda, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Vice President CP Radhakrishnan, President Droupadi Murmu, LS Speaker Om Birla, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge and Congress Leader Rahul Gandhi during Constitution Day celebrations at Central Hall of Samvidhan Sadan, in New Delhi, on Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi through his letter said that Constitution Day reminds the countrymen that freedom is not only about rights, but also about duties and a call for unity.

PRESIDENT MURMU

President Droupadi Murmu on Wednesday asserted that the Constitution is the cornerstone of the nation's identity, as also the guiding document to shun colonial mindset and adopt nationalistic thinking.

Addressing the Constitution Day event at the Central Hall of the Old Parliament building, Murmu also said the Indian Parliament, which expresses public aspirations in the world's largest democracy, now serves as an example for many democracies around the world.

She expressed confidence that under the guidance of Parliament, the resolve to make India a developed nation will definitely be fulfilled.

CJI SURYA KANT

The Bar occupies an indispensable place in fortifying the rule of law and upholding the sanctity of the Constitution, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant said while also stressing its importance in providing legal aid to the vulnerable and the marginalised.

Addressing a gathering at a Constitution Day function organised by the Supreme Court Bar Association, the CJI said "I do not hesitate in saying that if the courts are regarded as the sentinel of the Constitution, then the members of the Bar are the torchbearers who illuminate our path. They help us discharge our solemn duty with clarity and conviction," Justice Kant said.

PRIME MINISTER MODI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi through his letter said that Constitution Day reminds the countrymen that freedom is not only about rights, but also about duties and a call for unity.

"The sound of footsteps united society, boosted people's self-confidence, and instilled a sense of unity in millions of hearts. Sardar Patel knew that when people walk together, differences are left behind, and the path becomes supreme," Modi in his letter said.

MALLIKARJUN KHARGE

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge accused the BJP-RSS of damaging institutions and disrespecting the Constitution, claiming their current reverence for it is a mere pretence and sham as they never made any contribution in its making.

"Today, Mr. Modi lectures us on the dangers of Colonisation, but these very people belong to the same ideology who, during the freedom struggle and the national movement, never stood with the people of this country for even a minute, but instead they served British subjugation," he said in a post on X. *—PTI*

'PEOPLE'S RIGHTS TAKEN AWAY'

Mamata alleges NRC real intent behind SIR

KOLKATA, 26 NOV

West Bengal Chief Minister **Mamata Banerjee** on Wednesday alleged that the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls is a backdoor attempt to implement the NRC and create fear among ordinary citizens.

Speaking on Constitution Day after garlanding BR Ambedkar's statue at Red Road, she said, "People's voting and religious rights are being taken away... not even Dalits, minorities, or common Hindu voters are spared."

She alleged, "NRC is the real intent behind this. An atmosphere of intense fear has been created. On this Constitution Day, I pledge to protect India's democracy and uphold the rights guaranteed to every citizen under the Constitution."

Banerjee claimed SIR had caused distress among booth-level officers (BLOs) facing excessive work pressure and server issues, citing a 30-hour protest outside the Chief Electoral Officer's (CEO) office.

Additionally, Election Commission (EC) in a letter to Kolkata Police, termed the protest a "serious security breach" and instructed enhanced measures to protect officers. *—PTI*

UP Lekhpal, BLO suspended for lapses in SIR

District election officer Ravindra Kumar ordered the suspension of a lekhpal and a booth-level officer after finding serious lapses during an inspection of the ongoing Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls here. During an inspection at booth number 407 in Shahpur Primary School, he found that the work of BLO Rafiullah, a shiksha mitra, was unsatisfactory. Lekhpal and supervisor Vinod Kumar Yadav was found to have failed to provide accurate information and necessary support to two BLOs, leading to delays and negligence in the revision exercise. *—PTI*

Cabinet approves 2 rail projects worth ₹2,781 cr

NEW DELHI, 26 NOV

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved two key railway projects worth Rs 2,781 crore in Gujarat and Maharashtra, alongside clearing a major expansion of the Pune Metro network under Phase-2.

Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, cleared the doubling of the Dwarka–Kanalus line in Devbhumi Dwarka district and construction of third and fourth lines between Badlapur and Karjat in the Mumbai metropolitan region. The works will boost capacity, ease congestion and support freight movement of coal, salt, cement and containers.

The government said the projects will add 224 km of track across four districts and improve connectivity for nearly 585 villages. The Dwarka–Kanalus section will enhance access to the Dwarkadhish temple, while the Badlapur–Karjat expansion will strengthen Mumbai's suburban corridor and improve links to southern India.

Separately, the Cabinet approved Pune Metro's Line 4 and 4A, spanning 31.6 km with 28 elevated stations, at a cost of Rs 9,858 crore. The corridors will link key IT hubs, commercial zones and residential clusters across East, South and West Pune and integrate with existing and upcoming routes at Kharadi Bypass, Nal Stop and Swargate.

The project—jointly funded by the Centre, Maharashtra and external agencies—is expected to be completed in five years. Maha-Metro will implement the works, with ridership on both lines projected to rise from 4.09 lakh daily in 2028 to over 11.7 lakh by 2058. *—PTI*

AIADMK expelled Sengottaiyan quits; may join TVK or DMK

CHENNAI, 26 NOV

Expelled AIADMK leader KA Sengottaiyan on Wednesday tendered his resignation as an MLA from the Gobichettipalayam assembly constituency.

The nine-time MLA met Assembly Speaker M Appavu at the Secretariat and submitted his resignation letter.

Speculations are rife that Sengottaiyan may either join the actor Vijay-led TVK or the ruling DMK.

AIADMK General Secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami expelled Sengottaiyan from the party after he appeared with ousted leaders O Panneerselvam and Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam leader TTV Dhinakaran in Ramanathapuram district.

Palaniswami had stated that Sengottaiyan was removed from the primary membership of the party and appealed to party members not to maintain any ties with him.

Earlier, Panneerselvam's loyalist PH Manoj Pandian resigned as MLA from Alangulam constituency in Tenkasi after joining the DMK.

Meanwhile, the Tamil Nadu BJP on Wednesday dismissed the media reports speculating a change in the state's party leadership, saying the rumours were part of a "political conspiracy". BJP leaders accused DMK and its allies of "spreading rumours" Nagendran being called to New Delhi has triggered speculations regarding a leadership change in the party's state unit.

Moreover, senior Congress leader A Saleem Ahmed arrived in Chennai to select district presidents. Ahmed said he was here to have discussion with all leaders, block presidents, workers, frontal chiefs, and to select a president. *—PTI*

Speculations are rife that Sengottaiyan may either join the actor Vijay-led TVK or the ruling DMK *PHOTO: PTI*

Rabri Devi won't vacate her govt bungalow, says RJD

PATNA, 26 NOV

The RJD on Wednesday said former Bihar chief minister **Rabri Devi**, wife of its founding president Lalu Prasad, will not vacate the government bungalow she has been occupying for two decades.

The party's state unit Chief, Mangani Lal Mandal, made the remark a day after the state building construction department issued a notification directing Rabri Devi to shift to 39, Hardinge Road, which has been "earmarked" as the residence of the leader of the opposition in the legislative council. State minister Santosh Kumar Suman, the bungalow had been allotted to Rabri Devi in accordance with an earlier provision of a "lifelong" residence for former chief ministers.

Meanwhile, a Delhi court on Wednesday sought a response from the CBI on a plea filed by Rabri Devi seeking transfer of the IRCTC hotel scam case to a different judge.

The court, however, refused to stay the ongoing trial proceedings in the CBI case.

She had moved a plea seeking transfer of the CBI and ED cases registered against her to another court, as she was apprehensive that "fair and impartial justice" would not be rendered. *—PTI*

India flays Pak's remark on Ram Mandir's flag

NEW DELHI, 26 NOV

India on Wednesday firmly rejected Pakistan's criticism of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's participation in a flag-hoisting ceremony at Ayodhya's Ram temple, saying Islamabad had no moral authority to comment on the matter. External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said, "We have seen the reported remarks and reject them with the contempt they deserve. As a country with a deeply stained record of bigotry, repression and systemic mistreatment of its minorities, Pakistan has no moral standing to lecture others."

He added that instead of offering "hypocritical homilies", Pakistan should address its "abysmal" human-rights record.

Pakistan had expressed "deep concern" over Modi's presence at the event marking the formal completion of the temple and referred to its construction on the site of the demolished Babri Masjid. It alleged the ceremony reflected rising pressure on religious minorities in India, a claim New Delhi dismissed as baseless. *—PTI*

Aadhaar alone does not make someone voter: SC

>>>Continued from Page 1

Reiterating that Aadhaar is "not proof of citizenship", the bench said it is only one among several documents that may be submitted and cannot by itself justify inclusion in the voter list. "Just because someone gets Aadhaar for ration, should he be made a voter? Suppose someone from a neighbouring country is working here as a labourer," the CJI observed.

The court also fixed the schedule for hearings on state-specific challenges. For Tamil Nadu, EC must respond by 1 December. Pleas concerning Kerala will be taken up on 2 December. Petitions relating to West Bengal will be heard on 9 December.

Sibal said SIR undermines democracy participation by placing an unconstitutional burden on ordinary voters, many of whom are illiterate, to fill forms or risk exclusion. He argued that while Aadhaar does not prove citizenship, it establishes residence and creates a presumption that cannot be dismissed arbitrarily.

He warned that the two-month timeline for the SIR is unworkable, particularly in remote regions. "See the reality of my country... do you think people in far-flung areas of West Bengal or Bihar know how to fill enumeration forms?"

Advocate Prashant Bhushan cited Assam's SIR guidelines, saying they wrongly let electoral officers determine citizenship.

CJI said Assam is a "special case", governed by unique statutes and the system of foreigners' tribunals, with scrutiny limited to "D-voters" (doubtful voters). —PTI

SAFRAN'S LEAP CENTER

India's first jet engine MRO facility opens in Hyd

HYDERABAD, 26 NOV

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Safran Aircraft Engine Services India, French major Safran's maintenance, repair and overhaul facility for LEAP engines used in commercial aircraft, in Hyderabad, Telangana and said the facility will also help provide job opportunities for the youngsters. It is India's first jet engine MRO facility.

He said the country is a trusted partner and investors are co-creators.

Asserting that India has decriminalised hundreds of business-related provisions, he underlined that the National Single Window System has brought numerous approvals onto a single platform.

India is one of the fastest growing domestic aviation markets in the world, Modi said adding that India's domestic market is the third largest in the world.

India's airline companies have ordered more than 1,500 new aircraft.

Prime Minister Narendra Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, Union Civil Aviation Minister K Rammohan Naidu, Safran CEO Olivier Andries and others during the inauguration of French major Safran's Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) facility for aircraft engines, in Hyderabad *PHOTO: PTI*

He said nearly 85 percent of India's Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) work has been taking place outside the country, which led to higher costs, longer turnaround times, and aircraft remaining grounded for extended periods. Therefore, the Government of India is developing the nation as one of the world's major MRO hubs, he said.

The Safran facility in Hyderabad will become operational in 2026.

Safran said it is committed to setting up a final assembly line in India for Rafale engines and critical components if the Indian Air Force places more orders for the fighter jets.

Safran also expects to triple its annual revenue in the country to more than 3 billion euros by 2030. Additionally, Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to declare the Bengaluru–Hyderabad stretch as a defence and aerospace corridor.

Addressing an event here on Wednesday to inaugurate French major Safran's MRO facility for LEAP engines, Reddy said Telangana's aerospace and defence exports have doubled over the past year to Rs 30,000 crore. *—PTI*

Thane man kills woman, stuffs body in suitcase

THANE, 26 NOV

A 50-year-old man has been arrested for murdering his live-in partner after her body was found stuffed in a suitcase near a creek in Thane district. The victim, 22-year-old Priyanka Vishwakarma, was discovered under a bridge near Desai village on Monday, identified through a PVS tattoo on her wrist. Police say she was killed on 21 November after a fight. The accused, Vinod Srinivas Vishwakarma, allegedly kept the body at home for a day before dumping it in a suitcase on 22 November as decomposition began. He was traced through social media and CCTV, confessed to strangling her, and has been booked for murder and erasing evidence. *—PTI*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

US-based devotee donates Rs 9 crore to Tirumala

TIRUPATI, 26 NOV

A US-based devotee donated a whooping Rs 9 crore to the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams on Wednesday, temple body chairman BR Naidu said. M Ramalinga Raju donated the amount for the renovation of the PAC-1, PAC-2 and PAC-3 buildings. Raju had earlier donated Rs 16 crore in 2012. Extending congratulations on behalf of TTD for the contribution towards improving facilities for devotees, Naidu said he wished for the deity's blessings on Raju. The TTD chairman said he hoped to receive similar contributions from the donor in the future. TTD is the custodian of the Sri Venkateswara Swamy temple in Tirupati. The temple is considered to be the richest Hindu shrine in the world. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

DNA test sought for Meerut murder accused's baby

MEERUT, 26 NOV

Muskan, who is in Meerut jail for the gruesome murder of her husband Saurabh Rajput, has named her newborn daughter Radha even as her in-laws demanded a DNA test of the child. The child was born at the Lala Lajpat Rai Memorial Medical College on 24 November, also Saurabh's birthday. Muskan would be sent back to the district jail on Wednesday. The child may stay with the mother in the women's barrack until the age of six. The jail administration will provide clothes, supplementary nutrition and medical facilities for the newborn. Muskan, along with her lover Sahil Shukla allegedly murdered Saurabh and hid his body in a blue drum that was filled with cement. *—PTI*

J&K Katra's master plan includes 33 villages

JAMMU, 26 NOV

Thirty-three villages have been included in the extended master plan to ensure holistic, planned and sustained growth of Katra, the base camp for the pilgrims visiting the Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine in J&K's Reasi district. A meeting chaired by Commissioner Secretary, Housing and Urban Development Department, Mandeep Kaur reviewed the preparations and proposals under the 10-year Master Plan. Kaur said the administration is dedicated to transform Katra into a well-planned, resilient and modern urban centre for the residents, and tourists. The Inter Modal Station and waste management facilities. She also instructed formulation of a comprehensive 'Green Action Plan' to promote sustainability. *—PTI*

NIA arrests 7th suspect in Red Fort blast case

Soyab is accused of sheltering Umar before deadly car blast

NEW DELHI, 26 NOV

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has arrested a Faridabad resident, Soyab of Dhauj, for allegedly sheltering suicide bomber Umar Un Nabi shortly before the 10 November Red Fort blast, a major vehicle-borne IED attack that killed 15 people and injured more than two dozen.

Soyab is the seventh accused held in the case and, according to investigators, provided both refuge and logistical support to the bomber as he moved across Delhi in the final hours before the explosion.

NIA officials said the arrest has strengthened their understanding of the module's operations, adding that Soyab will be confronted with the six suspects arrested earlier. The anti-terror agency is tracking multiple leads across states in coordination with local police forces as it works to expose and dismantle the wider network linked to the attack. The

Accused in the blast near Red Fort metro station is being produced at Patiala House Court, in New Delhi on Wednesday *PHOTO: ANI*

Union Home Ministry transferred the probe to the NIA a day after the blast, prompting extensive searches and forensic examinations.

On Wednesday, the Special NIA Court at Patiala House remanded Soyab to 10-day NIA custody, while extending the custody of co-accused Amir Rashid Ali by seven days. The hearing was conducted in a closed courtroom under heavy security.

Earlier arrests included Dr Muzammil Shakeel Ganai of Pulwama, Dr Adeel Ahmed Rather of Anantnag, Dr Shaheen Saeed of Lucknow and Mufti Irfan Ahmad Wagay of Shopian, all detained in Srinagar on production orders issued by the Patiala House court. Investigators say they played key roles in planning and facilitating the attack. Two others, Amir Rashid Ali, in whose name the blast vehicle was registered, and Jasir Bilal Wani alias Danish, who allegedly offered technical assistance, were arrested previously.

The NIA has confirmed the bomber's identity as Umar Un Nabi, after forensic examination. Another vehicle linked to him has been seized for analysis. The agency has examined 73 witnesses so far and continues to pursue operatives connected to the conspiracy across Delhi, Jammu and Kashmir, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. *– ANI*

ABSCONDER CASE

SC: India can bring back offenders

NEW DELHI, 26 NOV

- "There are multiple offences… You come back. You will be given a red-carpet welcome," the SC bench told his counsel

The Supreme Court on Wednesday reaffirmed that the country has the right to bring back offenders evading Indian law as it declined to entertain a plea seeking withdrawal of an extradition request sent to the United Arab Emirates.

The petition was filed by Vijay Murlidhar Udhwani, against whom 153 cases are registered, including alleged bootlegging, forgery, smuggling and money laundering. Udhwani travelled to Dubai in July 2022 and has not returned since. A Red Corner Notice and an arrest warrant have also been issued against him.

A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta was hearing Udhwani's challenge to a Gujarat High Court order dismissing his plea to cancel the Red Corner Notice and withdraw the extradition request. "There are multiple offences… You come back. You will be given a red-carpet welcome," the bench told his counsel, adding that the petitioner could obtain details of the cases from the trial court.

When counsel said Udhwani lacked FIR details and did not have his passport, the bench responded, "You want the FIR details served on a platter in Dubai? You come here… They will bring you."

The petitioner also claimed fear for his safety, citing the custodial death of a co-accused, but eventually withdrew the plea after the bench said it was not inclined to entertain it. The High Court earlier found no irregularity in proceedings initiated to secure his presence. *—PTI*

Manipur forces seize rocket, uncover vast poppy fields

IMPHAL, 26 NOV

Security forces in Manipur have seized major weaponry and uncovered large-scale illicit poppy cultivation, highlighting worsening security and environmental concerns in the state.

Police said on Wednesday that an improvised long-range rocket containing nearly 40 kg of explosives was recovered during an operation in Gelmol village, Churachandpur district. A rocket-launching stand and a battery were also seized.

In a separate operation in Kangpokpi district, forces located a substantial cache of arms near Songlung village, including a German rifle, two bolt-action rifles, four pull-mechanism rifles, an improvised mortar, hand grenades, detonators, and a radio set. Further searches in the Gelbung jungle yielded a CMG carbine, a .303 rifle, two pistols, nine bolt-action rifles, a country-made SBBL weapon, a locally made grenade, plastic explosives, and communication handsets.

Meanwhile, former Manipur

Manipur security forces, seen along with the long-range rocket recovered during operation in Gelmol village *PHOTO: X/MANIPURPOLICE*

chief minister N Biren Singh has warned of the deepening threat posed by narcotics networks. Singh said an aerial survey conducted on 24 November, 2025, detected close to 700 acres of illegal poppy cultivation in the Makhan village hill ranges under Sapormeina Police Station in Kangpokpi district.

The area lies within the Kanglatongbi–Kangpokpi Reserved Forest and near Mount Koubru, a sacred site revered by Indigenous communities. Singh said the destruction of forests and cultural heritage is "real", urging continued and intensified efforts by security agencies to eradicate poppy cultivation and protect the state's fragile environment. *—PTI*

Sabarimala case: Padmakumar gets 2-day SIT custody

KOLLAM, 26 NOV

A Kerala court on Wednesday sent CPI(M) leader and former Travancore Devaswom Board president A Padmakumar to two-day custody of the Special Investigation Team probing the loss of gold from the Lord Ayyappa shrine in Sabarimala.

The SIT sought his custody to question him over allegedly recording "gold-plated copper plates" as "copper plates" in documents on the Sreekovil door frames.

Arrested last Thursday, Padmakumar is the eighth accused in the second case linked to the missing gold and will be produced before the court on Thursday evening.

The SIT is probing two cases, gold lost from the Dwarapalaka idols and discrepancies in the Sreekovil door frames.

Six people, including prime accused Unnikrishnan Potti, have been arrested. Sabarimala tantris have recorded statements.

Meanwhile, a case has been registered against YouTuber KM Shajahan for allegedly making false claims and promoting enmity in videos on the controversy. *—PTI*

Daughter-in-law of pan masala tycoon kills self

NEW DELHI, 26 NOV

Deepti Chaurasia, 40, daughter-in-law of Kamla Pasand owner Kamal Kishore Chaurasia, was found dead at her south Delhi residence on Tuesday.

Her family, however, has accused her husband Harpreet and mother-in-law of physical assault, sustained harassment and long-standing cruelty.

Deepti, married since 2010 and mother to a teenage son, was discovered by Harpreet, who rushed her to Safdarjung Hospital, where she was declared dead on arrival.

Police said the couple had been living separately due to ongoing disputes. A note and a diary were recovered, with entries referencing frequent marital discord and emotional distress.

Her brother Rishabh alleged that Deepti repeatedly complained of torture and of her husband's alleged extramarital affairs. "My sister used to call and say she was beaten and harassed. I don't know whether she was killed or died by suicide. I just want justice," he said, adding that Deepti often appeared frightened during conversations.

Media reports suggest Deepti was distressed over Harpreet's alleged second marriage to a South Indian actress, a development the family claims worsened tensions. They are considering filing a complaint for abetment to suicide.

However, Rajender Singh, lawyer for the Chaurasia family, dismissed the allegations as "baseless", claiming the suicide note named no one.

He said both families would conduct the cremation together "harmoniously", adding that the situation was "deeply unfortunate for everyone involved".

Police said a postmortem is underway and further investigation continues, including verification of diary entries and digital evidence.

"Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support." *— Agencies*

UP man kills sister for speaking to male friends

SHAHJAHANPUR, 26 NOV

A woman, 22, was allegedly murdered by her brother for speaking to her male friends on the phone, police said on Wednesday. The incident took place in Itora Gotiya village in Shahjahanpur and the victim was identified as Naina Devi.

According to SP Rajesh Dwivedi, the accused, Sher Singh, claimed his sister frequently talked to several men and had rejected marriage proposals. He reportedly became enraged after listening to recordings on her phone.

When Naina attempted to retrieve the device, Sher Singh stabbed her in the neck, killing her. He was arrested on Tuesday night and has been charged with murder, before being sent to custody. *—PTI*

VIT MP students go on a rampage over food quality

SEHORE, 26 NOV

Students at Vellore Institute of Technology's Sehore campus in Madhya Pradesh set fire to vehicles and damaged property during a late Tuesday night protest over alleged poor-quality food and water that they claim triggered jaundice.

Eyewitness videos showed a bus, two cars, an ambulance, hostel windows and an RO plant vandalised as unrest escalated. Police said about 3,000 students joined the protest. Security personnel from multiple stations reached the campus and held talks with students, assuring swift action. Ashta SDOP Akash Amalkar said the situation is now under control.

The college has declared a holiday until 30 November,

and several students have returned home. Officials will collect applications from hostel residents detailing grievances and information on sick students. MP Congress president Jitu Patwari accused the institution and the government of failing to provide safe food and water, calling the situation a systemic failure. *—PTI*

Protest escalates in Panjab varsity over Senate polls

CHANDIGARH, 26 NOV

Panjab University (PU) students on Wednesday intensified their protest demanding the long-pending Senate election schedule, even as heavy police deployment continued across the campus.

Led by the Panjab University Bachao Morcha, students gathered near the Vice-Chancellor's office and said their demonstration would continue until the university announces the schedule.

Police maintained extensive security, including the anti-riot vehicle Vajra.

The university declared a holiday, closed departments and postponed examinations.

The agitation began after the Centre's 28 October notification restructuring

the Senate and Syndicate, though the Ministry of Education withdrew the order on 7 November.

Students now insist the administration must release the election schedule, noting that the Vice-Chancellor has sent the proposal to the Chancellor. Political parties and farmers' unions have backed the protest. *—PTI*

Orry appears before Mumbai police in drugs seizure case

MUMBAI, 26 NOV

Bollywood socialite Orhan "Orry" Awatramani appeared before Mumbai's Anti-Narcotics Cell on Wednesday to record his statement in a major drug seizure case. He reached the ANC office around 1.30pm after seeking more time. His name emerged while probing Mohd Salim Suhail Shaikh, alias Lavish, a key accused in the Rs 252-crore mephedrone haul. Shaikh, deported from Dubai, allegedly organised rave parties. *— PTI*

NAT'L PLAYER AMONG VICTIMS

Two Haryana teens die as basketball poles fall

CHANDIGARH, 26 NOV

Two teenage boys, including a national-level basketball player, died in separate accidents in Haryana's Rohtak and Bahadurgarh after iron poles of basketball hoops collapsed on them, prompting sharp political criticism and a probe into the condition of sports infrastructure.

In Rohtak, a national-level player Hardik Rathi, 16, died during practice on Tuesday when a rusted pole gave way and fell on his chest. CCTV footage showed him reaching for the hoop before the structure suddenly collapsed. Fellow players rushed him to hospital, but he succumbed to

internal injuries, police said.

In Bahadurgarh, Aman, 15, suffered similar injuries on Sunday while practising on a government school court and died at PGIMS Rohtak the following night. Police said both incidents are under investigation, including the condition and maintenance of the equipment. Hardik's brother, Khadak Singh, alleged repeated complaints about the rusted pole were ignored and blamed official negligence for the deaths. He said Hardik, who participated in national sub-junior championships, dreamed of leading India's basketball team.

Opposition leaders accused the BJP government of allowing sports infrastructure to deteriorate. Congress leaders Bhupinder Singh Hooda, Randeep Singh Surjewala and MP Deepender alleged "criminal negligence", saying facilities built under the past government were left to decay. Surjewala termed Hardik's death "a murder by the system". *— Agencies*

26/11 aftermath: M'rashtra to draft drone-use policy

MUMBAI, 26 NOV

On the 17th anniversary of the 26/11 attacks, Maharashtra Police are drafting a drone-use policy to bolster security and surveillance in key cities, including Mumbai. A senior official said the initiative aims to counter emerging, unconventional terror threats, with the blueprint prepared by the elite commando unit Force One in coordination with central agencies.

The policy will guide drone deployments based on situational needs, supporting surveillance in major cities as well as Naxal-affected areas. A dedicated drone unit will be established once training and capability-building are complete.

Since the 2008 attacks, which killed 166 people, Mumbai has significantly modernised its security apparatus. Coastal security has been strengthened with improved radar systems, additional interceptor boats, and closer coordination between the police, Coast Guard and Navy.

The city's CCTV network is also expanding, with a third phase adding 866 cameras and upgrading existing ones with facial recognition and AI-based analytics. *—PTI*

REMEMBERING 26/11

Police pay tribute to the martyrs of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attack on its 17th anniversary on Wednesday, as Sushila Baban Ughade, wife of martyr Baban Baloo Ughade, mourns while offering her respects. Ten terrorists had carried out coordinated strikes across Mumbai on 26 November 2008, targeting locations including Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus and the Taj and Oberoi hotels. The 60-hour siege claimed 166 lives and left many others injured
PHOTO: PTI

What a disaster! India loses 8 Tests under Gambhir

India crashed to their third Test series defeat under head coach Gautam Gambhir when South Africa handed them a sound 0-2 beating with a win at Guwahati on Wednesday, completing 16 months of turbulent ride.

In this period, India lost to New Zealand at home 0-3, away to Australia 1-3, and now finally to the Proteas.

Right now, Gambhir's Test record as a coach stands at a well under-par 7 wins, 10 defeats and 2 draws in 19 matches for win percentage of 36.82.

He is only behind Duncan Fletcher, whose win percentage is 33.33 after 17 loses, 13 wins, 9 draws from 39 Tests.

South African players celebrate the wicket of India's Washington Sundar during the fifth day of the second Test cricket match between India and South Africa in Guwahati on Wednesday ***PHOTO: PTI***

Here's a quick recap of those eventful matches

1. NZ beat India by 8 wickets — Bengaluru

The eight-wicket drubbing was India's first home Test defeat to the Kiwis in 36 years. It was all the more painful because New Zealand pacers bundled out India for 46 in conditions akin to Christchurch or Wellington.

The depth of humiliation was deeper than Mariana Trench as it was the first time India bowled out for a total below 50 at home.

2. NZ beat India by 113 runs — Pune

It was the turn of New Zealand spinners to torment Indian batters. Left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner, ably supported by Ajaz Patel and Glenn Phillips, took 13 wickets in the second Test of the three-match series to sink India.

3. NZ beat India by 25 runs — Mumbai

The old combine of R Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja took eight wickets among them to skittle NZ for 174 runs in their second innings, leaving the home batters to make 147 runs to avoid a rare whitewash at home.

But despite Rishabh Pant's 57-ball 64, India were bundled out for 121 by Patel (6/57) and Phillips (3/42).

4. Australia beat India by 10 wickets — Adelaide

The happiness of a 295-run win in the first Test at Perth was dissipated in the Day-Night second Test at Adelaide. Mitchell Starc (6/48) and Travis Head (140) gave the Aussies the initial upper hand. Skipper Pat Cummins (5/57) crushed India in the second innings to leave the home batters with a meagre target of 19, that they went past without any damage.

5. Australia beat India by 184 runs — Melbourne

India entered the fourth Test at Melbourne after inclement weather saved them from a possible defeat at Brisbane. They had also lost Ashwin, who announced his retirement from top-level cricket after the drawn third Test. Steve Smith made a 140 to power the Aussies to a near 500 total. Though debutant Nitish Kumar Reddy made a gritty hundred, the Aussies had a lead in excess of 100 runs in their hand. They presented India with a target of 340 runs. Yashasvi Jaiswal offered a token fight with an 84 off 208 balls, but the tourists were skittled for 155.

6. Australia beat India by 6 wickets — Sydney

Trailing 1-2, India still had a chance to level the series. But they did not have the will to fight against pacer Scott Boland (4/31, 6/45). The Aussies needed to chase down 162, and they did after an initial fumble of being at 58 for three.

7. SA beat India by 30 runs — Kolkata

For the second time in a year, the Indian batters succumbed to visiting spinners, this time to Simon Harmer who had a wily Marco Jansen on his side.

Off-spinner Harmer walked away with an eight-wicket match haul as the once masters of spin failed to scale down 124 on a Kolkata pitch that resembled a mud-laden wrestling arena. India were all out for 93.

8. SA beat India by 408 runs — Guwahati

It was in the fitness of things that the hosts suffered their heaviest Test defeat ever in terms of runs in the country's newest Test venue. On a typical sub-continental pitch, pacer Jansen showered Indian batters with snorters to walk away with a six-wicket haul (6/48).

Boosted by an innings lead of 288, SA erected a target of 549 in front of India, and they failed to offer even a symbolic resistance to Harmer (6/37) to get bowled out for 140. *—PTI*

SALAR

X's location tool exposes foreign-run MAGA handles

They go by names like @TRUMP_ARMY— or @MAGANationX, and their verified accounts proudly display portraits of President Donald Trump, voter rallies and American flags. And they're constantly posting about US politics to their followers, sounding like diehard fans of the president.

But after a weekend update to the social media platform X, it's now clear that the owners of these accounts, and many others, are located in regions such as South Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe.

Elon Musk's X unveiled a feature Saturday that lets users see where an account is based. Online sleuths and experts quickly found that many popular accounts, often, but not limited to, posting in support of the MAGA movement to thousands or hundreds of thousands of followers, are based outside the United States, raising concerns about foreign influence on US politics. Researchers at NewsGuard, a firm that tracks online misinformation, identified several popular accounts, purportedly run by Americans interested in politics, that instead were based in Eastern Europe, Asia, or Africa.

The accounts were leading disseminators of some misleading and polarising claims about US politics, including ones that said Democrats bribed the moderators of a 2024 presidential debate.

What is the location feature?

Nikita Bier, X's head of product, announced Saturday that the social media platform is rolling out an "About This Account" tool, which lets users see the country or region where an account is based. To find an account's location, tap or click the sign-up date displayed on the profile.

> They go by names like @TRUMP_ARMY— or @MAGANationX, and their verified accounts proudly display portraits of President Donald Trump, voter rallies and American flags. And they're constantly posting about US politics to their followers, sounding like diehard fans of the president.

"This is an important first step to securing the integrity of the global town square. We plan to provide many more ways for users to verify the authenticity of the content they see on X," Bier wrote.

In countries with punitive speech restrictions, a privacy tool on X lets account holders only show their region rather than a specific country. So instead of India, for instance, an account can say it is based in South Asia.

Bier said Sunday that after an update to the tool, it would 99.99 per cent accurate, though this could not be independently verified. Accounts, for instance, can use a virtual private network, or VPN, to mask their true location. On some accounts, there's a notice saying the location data may not be accurate, either because the account uses a VPN or because some internet providers use proxies automatically, without action by the user.

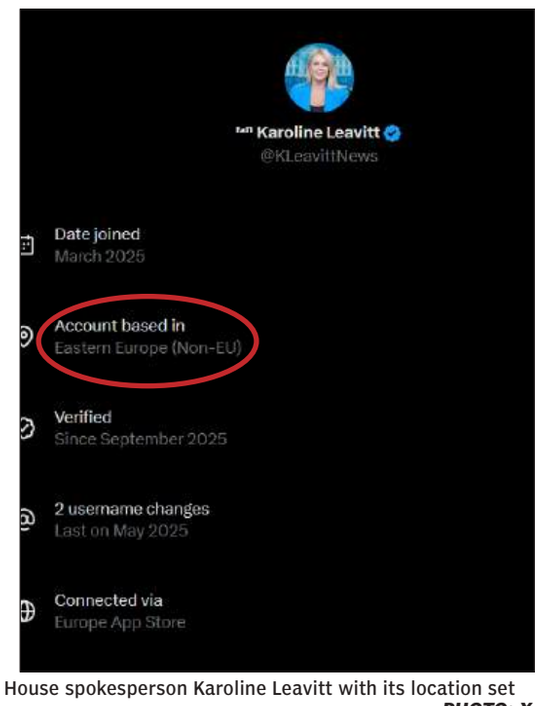
Which accounts are causing controversy?

Some of the accounts supported slain conservative activist Charlie Kirk as well as Trump's children. Many of the accounts were adorned with US flags or made comments suggesting they were American.

An account called "@BarronTNews_," for instance, is shown as being located in "Eastern Europe (Non-EU)," even though the display location on its profile says "Mar A Lago." The account, which has more than 5,80,000 followers, posted on Tuesday that "This is a FAN account, 100 per cent independent, run by one guy who loves this country and supports President Trump with everything I've got."

NewsGuard also found evidence that some X users are spreading misinformation about the location feature itself, incorrectly accusing some accounts of being operated from abroad when they're actually used by Americans. Investigators found several instances where one user created fake screenshots that appear to suggest an account was created overseas.

It's not always clear what the motives of the accounts. While some may be state actors, it's likely that many are financially motivated, posting commentary, memes and videos to draw engagement. Users were divided over the new ability to see an account's location information, with some questioning whether it went too far. "Isn't this kind of an invasion of privacy?" One X user wrote. "No one needs to see this info." *—PTI*



A screenshot shows a fan account of White House spokesperson Karoline Leavitt with its location set to Eastern Europe ***PHOTO: X***

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Trump's 'drone guy' Dan Driscoll emerges key in Ukraine peace talk

In a matter of days, Army Secretary Dan Driscoll vaulted from being the leader of a military bureaucracy, where he's been cutting red tape to quickly buy inexpensive drones, to a key negotiator in the Trump administration's push to end the Russia-Ukraine war.

The 38-year-old Iraq War veteran and former venture capitalist has been shuttling between Kyiv, Geneva and Abu Dhabi, taking on a diplomatic role, few would have predicted when he was confirmed by the Senate in February.

Driscoll, known for cutting red tape to rapidly procure inexpensive drones for the US Army, found himself presenting President Donald Trump's peace plan to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy last week, before sitting down with Russian officials in the United Arab Emirates on Monday and Tuesday.

His sudden emergence as a top negotiator comes as the administration pushes to finalise what Trump has described as "tremendous progress".

"In the hopes of finalising this Peace Plan," Trump wrote on social media on Tuesday, "I have directed my Special Envoy Steve Witkoff to meet with President Putin in Moscow and, at the same time, Secretary of the Army Dan Driscoll will be meeting with the Ukrainians."

It is an unlikely assignment for the Army's top civilian, whose confirmation hearing focused overwhelmingly on modernising Army systems, improving recruitment and strengthening the military industrial base. International diplomacy featured nowhere in the discussion.

A surprise diplomat

According to a US official, Driscoll learned only about a week beforehand that he would be stepping into the role of negotiator. His initial visit to Ukraine, long planned, was intended to assess how Ukrainian forces were using drones on the battlefield, not to broker peace.

Once named a special representative by the White House, Driscoll travelled to Europe for briefings before heading to Kyiv. There, he clasped hands with Zelenskyy and praised Ukrainian soldiers, noting that even the most battle-hardened American troops "never had to defend their homeland".

"When we in the Army look and see how well you guys have done, it's remarkable," Driscoll told the Ukrainian president. Zelenskyy said he had spoken for nearly an hour with Vice President JD Vance and Driscoll about the proposed peace framework.

Dan Driscoll, known for rapidly procuring inexpensive drones for the US Army, found himself presenting President Donald Trump's peace plan to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy last week ***PHOTO: X***

His performance in Ukraine appeared to bolster his standing.

From Kyiv, Driscoll travelled to Geneva, joining Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Witkoff and other senior officials to refine elements of the plan with Ukrainian negotiators.

He then flew to Abu Dhabi to engage with Russian representatives—talks which, the official noted, had seemed only a distant possibility a week earlier.

The Trump administration's calculated gamble

Foreign policy specialists say the choice of Driscoll is emblematic of the Trump administration's willingness to take unconventional approaches.

"The administration is willing to throw out ideas and try things," said Max Bergmann, director of the Europe, Russia and Eurasia Programme at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies. "But I had not heard of Dan Driscoll, to be frank, in Ukraine–Russia conversations at all."

Driscoll's chief asset may be his personal connection to Vice President Vance, whom he met while both were at Yale Law School. He later served as an adviser to Vance, giving him unusually direct access to the highest levels of the administration.

"There is something to be said about having someone who is probably texting with the vice president and therefore has that political juice," Bergmann said.

However, he cautioned that the technical details of any Ukraine–Russia settlement were highly complex, making deep expertise crucial.

Daniel Fried, a former US ambassador to Poland and now an Atlantic Council fellow, argued that gaps in Driscoll's foreign-policy background could be mitigated if he is backed by experienced advisers. More important, Fried said, is that negotiators be trusted by the administration they represent.

"You don't want to have someone who reaches a handshake deal with the Ukrainians or the Russians and doesn't have the confidence of the upper reaches of the Trump administration," he said.

From mountain roots to high-stakes diplomacy

Driscoll's biography offers little hint that he would one day help steer negotiations to end Europe's deadliest conflict since the Second World War. Raised in the mountains of North Carolina, he described himself during his confirmation hearing as "a middle-class public school kid" whose father had been an Army infantryman in Vietnam and whose grandfather served as a decoder in the Second World War.

He graduated from the University of North Carolina's business school in just three years before serving more than three years as an armour officer in the US Army, reaching the rank of first lieutenant. He deployed to Iraq between October 2009 and July 2010. After law school, he worked in venture capital and ran unsuccessfully for Congress in North Carolina in 2020, earning around 8 per cent of the vote in a crowded Republican primary. As Army Secretary, Driscoll has taken on negotiations of a different kind, including efforts to retain access to the Pohakuloa Training Area in Hawaii, the only large-scale live-fire range for US ground forces in the Pacific. The lease is contentious, with Native Hawaiian groups and environmental activists calling for the land to be returned to the state. In July, Driscoll travelled to Hawaii to meet Governor Josh Green, whose office described the talks as "cordial" and at an early stage. Now, Driscoll finds himself navigating stakes far higher than an Army training lease. With Trump signalling urgency and senior envoys engaging Moscow and Kyiv in parallel, the administration appears committed to an accelerated diplomatic push.

Whether Driscoll's unconventional appointment proves a masterstroke or a miscalculation remains to be seen, but his swift ascent underscores the administration's penchant for bold, unexpected moves in pursuit of a deal. *—PTI*

Soldiers say they have 'total control' of Guinea-Bissau

BISSAU, 26 NOV

Soldiers in Guinea-Bissau appeared on state television saying they have seized power in the country, following reports of gunshots near the presidential palace on Wednesday, three days after national elections were held. The presidential and legislative elections were held Sunday. Incumbent President Umaro Sissoco Embalo and opposition candidate Fernando Dias da Costa each claimed victory Tuesday, even though official provisional results are not expected until Thursday. Dinis N'Tchama, spokesperson for the country's military high command, in a statement said it was in reaction to "the discovery of an ongoing plan" aiming to destabilise the country, adding that "domestic and foreign nationals" attempted to "manipulate electoral results to implement this plan". Gunfire was heard Wednesday around noon near the presidential palace in Guinea-Bissau's capital.—*PTI*

Taiwan plans $40B in defence spending

Budget comes amid Japan, China spat

Taiwanese President Lai Chingte said that the special defence budget would be used to purchase arms from the US. The lastest push is seen as a counter to increased threats from China **PHOTO: X**

TAIPEI, 26 NOV

Taiwan's President Lai Chingte said Wednesday he will put forth a special USD 40 billion budget for arms purchases, including to build a Taiwan Dome, an air defence system with high-level detection and interception capabilities, in the face of US pressure for the island to increase its spendig in the defence sector. The budget will be allocated over eight years, from 2026 to 2033, and comes after Lai already pledged to raise defence spending to 5 per cent of the island's GDP. Currently, Taiwan has budgeted an increase in its defence budget to 3.3 per cent for 2026, allocating TWD 949.5 billion (USD 31.18 billion). Lai had previewed the announcement in an op-ed for the Washington Post on Wednesday, saying the special budget would be used to purchase arms from the US. While Taiwan has been ramping up its defence budget over the decades, the latest push is seen as a counter to the increased Chinese threats. Wellington Koo, Taiwan's minister of national defence, said Wednesday the USD 40 billion is an upper limit for the special budget and that it will be used to buy precision-strike missiles and toward the joint development and procurement between Taiwan and the US of equipment and systems. This budget announcement comes as Tokyo and Beijing were locked in a weeks-long diplomatic spat. —*Agencies*

- The budget will be allocated over eight years, from 2026 to 2033, and comes after Lai pledged to raise defence spending to 5 per cent of the island's GDP. Taiwan budgeted an increase to 3.3 per cent for 2026.

HONG KONG FIRE

PHOTO: PTI

At least 13 people died after a fire swept high-rise buildings in Hong Kong's Tai district. 700 residents were evacuated to temporary shelters as the blaze spread along bamboo scaffolding and construction netting. The government also announced plans to phase out bamboo scaffolding

UK's Treasury Chief delivers budget with tax hikes

LONDON, 26 NOV

Britain's Treasury chief Rachel Reeves stood up Wednesday to deliver a crucial tax-raising budget statement to lawmakers following an unprecedented leak from the government's independent forecaster that basically laid out her measures.

The biggest change in terms of money raised, according to the leak from the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), is freezing the levels at which earners pay Britain's different tax levels, meaning as wages rise, more people fall into higher tax brackets.

Other measures include a mansion tax on high-valued properties, changes to the capital tax regime and a cut to tax-free provisions for private pensions.

According to the leaked documents, the government will raise 26 billion pounds (USD 34 billion) in 2029-30. The OBR apologised and blamed a "technical error" for the leak.

The leak is a further embarrassment for the centre-left Labour government following weeks of speculation and mixed signals that unsettled the markets.

The budget could prove pivotal in the fortunes of both Reeves and Prime Minister Keir Starmer.

The overall message in the budget is much the same at it was in her first budget a little more than a year ago.

She insisted at the time that it would be the one and only big tax-raising budget in this parliamentary term, which is due to run to 2029.

The UK economy isn't doing well, with many critics blaming her decision to slap taxes on the business. The budget is a high-stakes moment for Reeves and Starmer, who is facing mounting concern from Labour lawmakers over his dire poll ratings. Opinion polls consistently put Labour well behind the hard-right Reform UK party led by Nigel Farage.

The government hopes that its economic measures will boost growth and ease financial pressures. Speculations are rife about a potential challenge to Starmer's leadership within the party. —*PTI*

Israel, Hamas exchange hostages, bodies

JERUSALEM, 26 NOV

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Wednesday that Israel had identified the latest remains returned from Gaza as hostage Dror Or.

That leaves the bodies of an Israeli and a Thai hostage in Gaza as the first phase of the Israel-Hamas ceasefire agreement nears a conclusion.

Palestinian militants released Or's remains on 25 November.

Or and his wife, Yonat were killed by Islamic Jihad militants in Kibbutz Beeri in October, 2023.

Two of Or's children were also abducted by Hamas, but later released.

Meanwhile, Israel handed over 15 more Palestinian bodies, completing the latest swap of the ceasefire as the first phase of the agreement nears a conclusion and officials convened to discuss moving to the second.

The next phases include deploying an international stabilisation force and developing an international body to govern Gaza and oversee reconstruction. —*PTI*

Russia launched attacks in Ukraine's capital **PHOTO: X**

US envoys to meet Putin, Ukrainians for peace talks

WASHINGTON, 26 NOV

US President Donald Trump said his plan to end the war in Ukraine has been "fine-tuned" and he's sending envoy Steve Witkoff to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Army Secretary Dan Driscoll to meet with Ukrainian officials.

He believed Witkoff would be meeting with Putin next week in Moscow, with his son-in-law Jared Kushner potentially joining the meeting.

Trump said he would eventually meet with Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy after further progress has been made in negotiations.

Speaking to press on Tuesday evening aboard Air Force One, Trump described what had been a 28-point plan as a work in progress. "That was not a plan — it was a concept".

He played down the element of his plan that would require Ukraine to cede territory to Russia, suggesting that Russian forces were already likely to seize the land they're seeking.

"It's just moving in one direction," Trump said. "So eventually that's land that over the next couple of months might be gotten by Russia anyway."

Meanwhile, Zelenskyy said late Monday that "the list of necessary steps to end the war can become workable." He said he planned to discuss "sensitive" outstanding issues with Trump. His aide said that the Ukrainian President hoped to finalise a deal with Trump in November.

Meanwhile, after a Coalition of the Willing meet, French President Emmanuel Macron said that peace efforts are gathering momentum "but we don't want peace that is effectively a capitulation."

RUSSIA, UKRAINE TRADE STRIKES

Russia launched a wave of overnight attacks on Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, with at least seven people killed in strikes that hit city buildings and energy infrastructure.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's fourth-largest attack on Russia killed three people, wounded six and damaged homes. —*PTI*

Direct flights soon between Pak & B'desh

LAHORE, 26 NOV

Direct flights between Pakistan and Bangladesh will begin next month, a significant step in strengthening connectivity between the two countries, Dhaka's top diplomat said here Wednesday.

There has been no direct flight between Pakistan and Bangladesh for the last several years. As relations between the two countries improved this year, two Pakistani private airlines have recently received approval for direct flights.

"Mahan Air will start three weekly flights between Dhaka and Karachi from next month," Bangladesh's High Commissioner in Islamabad, Iqbal Hussain Khan, told businessmen at Lahore Chamber of Commerce & Industry (LCCI) here.

35 Afghani refugee camps in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province will be shut down, Islamabad said as tensions with Kabul escalate again.

Mahan Airlines, operating under the name Mahan Air, is a private Iranian airline based in Tehran.

Recently, two Pakistani private airlines – Fly Jinnah and AirSial – received approval from the authorities in Bangladesh to operate direct flights between Pakistan and Bangladesh.

High Commissioner Khan said that a direct cargo shipping service between the two countries will also be launched soon. —*PTI*

AGAINST INEQUALITY

Hundreds of women marched through Mexico City's streets Tuesday to protest violence against women. Gender violence and equality gained prominence after President Claudia Sheinbaum, Mexico's first female leader, took office in 2024. But even she was groped by a drunken man earlier this month. Mexico's National Institute of Statistics and Geography said in 2021 that 70 per cent of Mexican women and girls older than 15 experienced some kind of violence and half of them were sexually harassed **PHOTO: X**

Bolsanaro sentenced to 27-year prison term for coup

BRASILIA, 26 NOV

Brazil's Supreme Court on Tuesday ordered former President Jair Bolsonaro to begin serving his 27-year prison sentence for allegedly plotting an attempted coup.

Bolsonaro, a close ally of US President Donald Trump, was convicted in 2022 of conspiring to overthrow his successor, President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. His defence team chose not to file a final appeal against the conviction. As a result, Justice Moraes declared the ruling final.

Bolsonaro has been in custody at Brazil's federal police headquarters since Saturday after authorities detained him for allegedly tampering with his court-ordered ankle monitor. He tried to block Lula from taking office. —*ANI*

Trump backs Kash Patel amid firing rumours

WASHINGTON, 26 NOV

US President Donald Trump pardons two turkeys - Gobble and Waddle for Thanksgiving on Tuesday in the most unusual way. He used the ritual to attack Democratioc stalwarts, Chuck Schemur and Nancy Pelosi, joking that the birds should have been named Chuck and Nancy, he would never pardon them. He also mocked former president Joe Biden **PHOTO: WH**

US President Donald Trump dismissed reports that he was considering firing Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director Kash Patel from his post, saying that the 45-year-old American lawyer was "doing a great job."

News outlet MS NOW had published a report citing three unnamed sources that claiming Trump was "considering removing Kash Patel as FBI director in the coming months, as he and his top aides have grown increasingly frustrated by the unflattering headlines Patel has recently generated."

The White House also denied the report. White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said that the story was "completely made up." She posted a photo of Trump and Patel that she said was taken in the Oval Office on Tuesday and said the President was meeting the FBI Director when the story broke. Trump laughed at the report, she said. —*Agencies*

PARAMILITARY GROUPS ABDUCT 150 PEOPLE FROM SUDAN MINE: MEDICS

CAIRO, 26 NOV

Paramilitary groups Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPML) kidnapped at least 150 men and children from a mine in Sudan's South Kordofan region, the Sudan Doctors Network said in a statement.

Notably this comes a day after the RSF reportedly declared a three-month humanitarian truce amid US pressure to reach a ceasefire deal. Both the warring factions – the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the RSF – have rejected the US proposal.

The doctor's group said that they were abducted for the purpose of recruitment said it was a "direct assault on civilians that amounts to war crimes and grave violations of international humanitarian law".

This was not the first time that the paramilitary groups kidnapped people to recruit. Most recently, on Saturday, a group of around 70 gunmen on RSF and SPLM motorcycles entered the Tibsa village and market in Abbasiya locality and abducted hundreds of men.

Meanwhile, the SAF said Tuesday it repelled an attack by the RSF on the city of Babanusa in southern West Kordofan State. The SAF said it had killed a number of RSF field commanders and hundreds of fighters —*Salar News*

LOOT STILL UNTRACED

4 more held in $102M Louvre jewel heist

PARIS, 26 NOV

The Paris prosecutor announced four more arrests Tuesday in connection with the stunning heist at the Louvre Museum in October. A gang of robbers looted $102 million worth of jewels.

The two men and two women taken into custody are from the Paris region and range in age from 31 to 40, said the prosecutor, Laure Beccuau, whose office is heading the investigation. Her statement didn't say what role they're suspected of having played in the 19 October theft. Police can hold them for questioning for 96 hours.

French media said that one of those arrested, a 39-year-old already known to police services, is believed to be the fourth member of the team thought to have carried out the daring daylight robbery and is from Aubervilliers, a suburb north of Paris other suspects have connections with.

The other three alleged members of the so-called "commando" team have been previously arrested and face preliminary charges of theft by an organised gang and criminal conspiracy. Their DNA has been found on the scene or on items linked to the robbery.

A woman arrested in October is accused of complicity. The loot hasn't been recovered. It includes a diamond-and-emerald necklace Napoleon gave to Empress Marie-Louise, jewels tied to 19th-century Queens Marie-Amelie and Hortense, and Empress Eugenie's pearl-and-diamond tiara. The emerald-set imperial crown of Napoleon III's wife, Empress Eugenie, containing more than 1,300 diamonds, was later found outside the museum. —*PTI*

- The two men and two women taken into custody are from the Paris region and range in age from 31 to 40, said the prosecutor, Laure Beccuau.

Visitors at the Louvre Museum in Paris **PHOTO: LOUVRE.FR/EN**

PHOTO: AI

Gold surges to hit nearly 2-week high of Rs 1.30L/10g

NEW DELHI, 26 NOV

Gold prices surged Rs 1,200 to hit near a two-week high of Rs 1,30,100 per 10g in the national capital on Wednesday, tracking a rally in the international markets, according to the All India Sarafa Association. Analysts said the rise was mainly driven by renewed expectations of interest-rate cuts by the US Federal Reserve next month. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity also advanced by Rs 1,200 to Rs 1,29,500 per 10g (inclusive of all taxes). On 13 November, gold of 99.9 per cent and 99.5 per cent closed at Rs 1,30,900 and Rs 1,30,300 per 10g levels, respectively. Silver prices also gained momentum for the second straight day, surging Rs 2,300 to Rs 1,63,100 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes) on Wednesday. *—PTI*

Rupee ends almost flat at 89.23 against USD

MUMBAI, 26 NOV

The rupee slipped 1 paisa to close at 89.23 (provisional) against the US dollar in a range-bound trade on Wednesday, as firm domestic equities and a slide in global crude prices offset the impact of a strengthening greenback. Foreign fund outflows and concerns over geopolitical developments sapped risk appetite in the market, pushing investors towards safe-haven assets, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 89.24 and moved in a close range of 89.17-89.28 against the dollar. The unit finally settled at 89.23, registering a loss of 1 paisa from its previous closing level. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, rose 0.12 per cent to 99.70. *—PTI*

Nasscom, IBM to train 87,000 underserved youth

NEW DELHI, 26 NOV

The Nasscom Foundation on Wednesday announced a partnership with IBM to upskill around 87,000 marginalised youth across India with digital skills through the IBM SkillsBuild programme. The initiative aims to bridge the digital divide by providing underserved communities with access to market-relevant digital, domain, and employability training. The programme offers free digital courses and hands-on experience in emerging technologies like AI, cybersecurity, cloud computing, data analytics, and professional development, a company statement said. Apart from self-paced learning, it includes mentorship to build technical proficiency. The project, part of IBM's global commitment to skill 30 million people by 2030. *—PTI*

PepsiCo brings gourmet chips Red Rock Deli to India

NEW DELHI, 26 NOV

PepsiCo India on Wednesday said it has expanded its snacking portfolio by launching Red Rock Deli, a gourmet chips brand. Born in Australia and recognised worldwide for its gourmet-style chips, the brand enters the market with exotic flavours now manufactured in India, a company statement said. Made with sunflower oil and created using three distinct advanced technologies – Kettle Cooked, Baked and Popped – the range blends exotic flavours. The brand's arrival comes at a time when India's snacking landscape is changing, the company said. "Today's consumers want chef-inspired snacks. Introducing the brand in India is aimed at catering to this consumer shift toward richer textures and bolder ingredients," Saakshi Verma Menon, Chief Marketing Officer, Foods, PepsiCo India, said. *—PTI*

Sensex up 1,022 pts; Nifty near record mark

A total of 2,800 stocks advance while 1,371 decline; 154 remain unchanged on the BSE

MUMBAI, 26 NOV

Snapping the three-day falling streak, benchmark Sensex rebounded by 1,022 points while Nifty reclaimed the 26,000 level on Wednesday on across-the-board buying aided by a rally in global peers amid growing hopes of a US Fed rate cut and fresh foreign fund inflows.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,022.50 points or 1.21 per cent to settle at 85,609.51. During the day, it surged 1,057.18 points or 1.24 per cent to 85,644.19.

The 50-share NSE Nifty zoomed 320.50 points or 1.24 per cent to end at 26,205.30, just 10 points shy of its all time closing high.

The broader index scaled record intra-day high of 26,277 on 27 September, 2024.In intraday trade, Nifty rallied 330.35 points or 1.27 per cent to 26,215.15.

Increasing optimism surrounding a potential truce between Russia and Ukraine also bolstered the investor sentiment, experts said.

Market participation was broad-based, with metals, energy and IT leading the gains **PHOTO: PTI**

Among Sensex firms, Bajaj Finserv, Bajaj Finance, Tata Steel, Reliance Industries, Sun Pharma, Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles, Axis Bank and Infosys were among the major gainers.

Bharti Airtel and Asian Paints emerged as the laggards from the pack.

Market participation was broad-based, with metals, energy and IT leading the gains. Mid-cap and small-cap indices also advanced over 1 per cent. The BSE midcap gauge jumped 1.32 per cent and smallcap index climbed 1.23 per cent

A total of 2,800 stocks advanced while 1,371 declined and 154 remained unchanged on the BSE. *—PTI*

Excelsoft Tech shares debut 5% higher

Shares of Excelsoft Technologies Ltd on Wednesday ended with a premium of nearly 5 per cent against the issue price of Rs 120. The stock made its market debut at Rs 135, rallying 12.5 per cent from the issue price on both the BSE and NSE. Stocks on BSE ended at Rs 125.95 per share, up 4.95 per cent. On NSE, shares of the firm ended at Rs 125.97 apiece, registering a jump of 4.97 per cent. The company's market valuation stood at Rs 1,449.49 crore. The IPO of the firm received 43.19 times subscription on the closing day. *—PTI*

MCX SHARES CROSS RS 10,000 MARK; STOCK RALLIES 132%

NEW DELHI, 26 NOV

The shares of Multi Commodity Exchange of India (MCX) jumped nearly 4 percent to hit a fresh lifetime high of Rs 10,250 apiece on Wednesday. The stock has rallied more than 132 percent in just eight months after hitting a record low of Rs 4,408 in March this year.

The stock has now crossed the key psychological mark of Rs 10,000 per share, recording gains in eight out of the past 10 sessions. The company currently has a market capitalization of more than Rs 52,400 crore.

MCX shares have rallied more than 530 percent in the past five years, and over 685 percent in its lifetime. Several brokerages hold bullish calls for the stock.

MCX shares are overall up around 62 percent in 2025 so far.

The sharp surge in MCX's share price may have also been driven by the massive rally in precious metals and other commodities, whose futures are traded on the platform. *—Agencies*

Digital Connexion to invest $11 billion in Andhra by 2030

NEW DELHI, 26 NOV

Digital Connexion, a joint venture between Brookfield, Reliance Industries and US-based Digital Realty, on Wednesday said it will invest USD 11 billion, about Rs 98,000 crore, by 2030 to build 1 Gigawatts data centres in Andhra Pradesh.

The AI-native, purpose-built data centres will be spread over 400 acres in Visakhapatnam, the digital infrastructure company said in a statement.

"Digital Connexion... announced an investment of approximately USD 11 billion over a period of five years till 2030 for building 1 Gigawatts state-of-the-art AI-native, purpose-built data centres in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh across 400 acres of land," the company statement said.

This is the second major investment in the country, which follows Google's announcement made last month to invest USD 15 billion in Andhra Pradesh for building an artificial intelligence hub comprising data centres as well in Visakhapatnam.

Digital Connexion has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Andhra Pradesh Economic Development Board for making the investment, the statement said.

"Digital Connexion data centres are purpose-built to support seamless AI workloads empowering hyperscalers and enterprises with future-ready systems, robust substations, redundant power feeds, and rack densities to power the next decade of innovation," the statement.

The company already has a campus in Chennai, and another is being constructed in Mumbai's Chandivali area. Both are strategically located for low-latency, carrier-neutral connectivity, the statement said. *—PTI*

Bharti Airtel's ₹7,189 cr shares sold in block deal

NEW DELHI, 26 NOV

The Indian Continent Investment Ltd (ICIL), a company belonging to telecom czar Sunil Bharti Mittal's family office, on Wednesday sold 3.43 crore equity shares, or 0.56 per cent stake, in Bharti Airtel for about Rs 7,190 crore (USD 806 million).

After the share sale, Bharti Airtel's scrip fell 3 per cent to Rs 2,097.50 apiece on the NSE while it dipped by 2.81 per cent to Rs 2,100 per share on the BSE.

ICILis one of the promoter entities in city-based Bharti Airtel.

Under the transaction, the share sale comprises up to 34.3 million (3.43 crore) shares, representing 0.56 per cent of the outstanding share capital by the selling shareholder.

The shares were offloaded at a floor price of Rs 2,096.70 per share, a 3 per cent discount to Bharti Airtel's closing price of Rs 2,161.60 apiece on the NSE on 25 November.

The transaction is pegged at around USD 806 million, or about Rs 7,189.19 crore.

ICIL owned a 1.48 per cent stake in Airtel at the end of the September quarter. The promoter entities, including Bharti Telecom Ltd and Singtel's affiliate Pastel Ltd, hold a 50.27 per cent stake in the telecom major.

ICIL's holding in Bharti Airtel dropped to 0.92 per cent from 1.48 per cent.

Singtel had sold about 0.8 per cent stake in Bharti Airtel for Rs 10,353 crore. *—Agencies*

HP may lay off 4,000-6,000 employees

CALIFORNIA, 26 NOV

HP has become the latest technology company to announce large-scale job cuts. The company plans to reduce its workforce by 4,000 to 6,000 employees by the end of 2028, linking the move to organisational restructuring and the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI), according to Business Insider.

During its earnings presentation, CEO Enrique Lores explained that HP had been experimenting with AI for two years. "We need to start from redesigning the process, and once we know how the process could be redone using AI, it can have a very significant impact," he said.

Lores highlighted that HP had 'finished a strong 2025' and aims to grow faster than the market in 2026 by embedding AI in all aspects of its operations.

The restructuring is expected to save HP approximately $1 billion by 2028, although related costs are projected at $650 million, with around $250 million expected in fiscal 2026.

The plan includes workforce reductions, platform simplification, programme consolidation, & productivity improvements, all driven by AI integration. *—Agencies.*

USERS CHANGING PLATFORMS

Google Meet down, users seek alternatives

CALIFORNIA, 26 NOV

Google Meet experienced disruptions across India on Wednesday, forcing users to shift to other video-conferencing platforms for scheduled meetings. For those seeking reliable substitutes, several established services offer comparable features and stable performance, said sources.

According to the sources, Microsoft Teams is a strong option, especially for workplaces already embedded in the Microsoft ecosystem. It integrates smoothly with Word, PowerPoint and Outlook, supports file-sharing within chats, real-time document collaboration and includes robust security tools. Free users get unlimited chats and meetings of up to 60 minutes, adequate for most routine calls.

Zoom remains one of the most widely used alternatives, known for its simple interface and stable connectivity. The free plan permits 40-minute meetings with up to 100 participants, with longer sessions available through paid tiers. It also offers breakout rooms for smaller discussions and supports local meeting recordings, it added.

Zoho Meeting is a "Made in India" browser-based platform requiring no app download. It provides end-to-end encryption and supports up to 100 participants for 60-minute meetings on its free plan, the sources said.

Slack Huddles is another convenient option.. The feature mimics quick, informal desk-side conversations and is useful for spontaneous discussions without shifting to a separate app, it added. *—Agencies*

Sebi weighs easing rules for duplicate securities to Rs 10 lakh

NEW DELHI, 26 NOV

Sebi has proposed doubling the monetary threshold for simplified documentation when issuing duplicate securities, raising it from Rs 5 lakh to Rs 10 lakh. The regulator said the current limit was set several years ago and no longer reflects the scale of India's securities market, which has grown significantly in market capitalisation, investor participation and average portfolio size. As a result, individual investments today are typically higher, and the old threshold creates unnecessary procedural hurdles.

Investors currently face non-standardised requirements across listed companies and their registrars, often having to submit FIRs, police complaints, court orders or newspaper advertisements. To reduce this burden, Sebi has suggested introducing a common affidavit-cum-indemnity form, making documentation simpler and less costly.

The regulator also proposed that stamp duty be based on the investor's state of residence, matching the practice followed by the Investor Education and Protection Fund Authority. *—PTI*

India to begin trade negotiations with Russia from today

NEW DELHI, 26 NOV

India will launch formal negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement with the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union starting today, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal announced at a press conference in the capital on Tuesday.

The minister confirmed that the FTA discussions with the five-member Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) bloc--comprising Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan--will begin in New Delhi following the signing of Terms of Reference on 20 August, 2025.

"The FTA talks start from tomorrow here," Goyal stated on Tuesday.

The Terms of Reference lay out an 18-month roadmap focused on opening new markets for Indian businesses, particularly micro, small and medium enterprises, farmers and fishermen.

The initiative gains significance as India seeks to diversify its export destinations in response to high tariffs imposed by the US.

Beyond the EAEU talks, Goyal revealed India is pursuing several other trade partnerships.

India is also in discussions on the second phase of a preferential trade agreement with Mercosur, the Latin American trading bloc comprising Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay. *—ANI*

CHANGE IN WHATSAPP POLICIES

Microsoft's Copilot to leave WhatsApp in January 2026

WASHINGTON, 26 NOV

Microsoft has officially announced Copilot's exit from the messaging app WhatsApp in January, 2026, the source said.

According to the sources, he company said that this move comes after WhatsApp introduced changes to its policies, the source said.

"This is due to recent updates to WhatsApp's platform policies removing all LLM chatbots from the platform effective January 15th, and as a result, Copilot will be discontinued. We're working to ensure a smooth transition for users and enable their continued Copilot access on mobile, web, and PC," Microsoft said.

Microsoft, in its official blog, shared that, "Since launching in late 2024, Copilot on WhatsApp has helped millions of people connect with their AI companion in a familiar, everyday setting. We're incredibly proud of the impact it's had. But starting 15 January, 2026, Copilot will no longer be available on WhatsApp."

Sources said that, as the access to Copilot on WhatsApp was unauthenticated, the AI chatbot's chat history of WhatsApp users will not be saved when it transfers to other Microsoft platforms. However the firm said that users can export the chats with WhatsApp's in-built tool to retain conversations and for future.

It said, "If you'd like to keep a record of your conversations, we recommend exporting your chat history using WhatsApp's built-in tools prior to 15 January , 2026." *—Agencies*

India's MRO sector to be worth $4B by 2031: Naidu

HYDERABAD, 26 NOV

- The SAESI facility, which will be operational in 2026, will boost the country's indigenous capabilities in the aviation sector.

India's aircraft maintenance, repair and overhaul market is projected to be worth USD 4 billion by 2031 providing unprecedented opportunities, Civil Aviation Minister **K Rammohan Naidu** said.

Speaking at the inauguration of French major Safran's MRO (maintenance, repair and overhaul) facility in Hyderabad, Naidu said the country will become a preferred destination for aircraft maintenance activities.

The Safran Aircraft Engine Services India (SAESI) facility, which will be operational in 2026, will boost the country's indigenous capabilities in the aviation sector. Naidu also noted that carrying out aircraft MRO activities within the country will help save up to $15 billion in foreign exchange.

The cost savings of the airlines will be passed on to the passengers.

India is one of the world's fastest growing civil aviation markets and domestic carriers have over 1,500 planes on order. *—PTI*

World Bank backs 2 projects in Punjab and Maharashtra

NEW DELHI, 26 NOV

The World Bank on Wednesday announced it has approved funding for two major projects in India that will benefit more than six million people by using innovative digital solutions to improve education in Punjab and enhance farmers' incomes in Maharashtra.

The Punjab Outcomes-Acceleration in School Education Operation (POISE), worth $286 million, will support improved teaching standards by using technology to monitor learning outcomes. The second initiative, the Maharashtra Project on Climate Resilient Agriculture Phase II, valued at $490 million, will introduce digital precision farming. *—PTI*

Under Gambhir, India suffers worst defeat to SA

India slipped to 5th in WTC rankings following their embarrassing whitewash at home

South Africa's players celebrate with the trophy at the end of the fifth day of the second Test cricket match between India and South Africa, at ACA Stadium, Barsapara in Guwahati, on Wednesday; India's head coach Gautam Gambhir
India's Akash Deep, Mohammed Siraj, captain Rishabh Pant, Jasprit Bumrah
PHOTO: PTI

GUWAHATI, 26 NOV

A clueless and underprepared Indian side crashed to its heaviest-ever defeat in terms of runs at home, losing the second Test to South Africa by a staggering 408 runs in Guwahati on Wednesday. The result sealed the visitors' first Test series triumph in India in 25 years and intensified scrutiny on head coach Gautam Gambhir, under whom India have now lost five home Tests to New Zealand and South Africa.

Gambhir, however, remained combative even while accepting responsibility. "The blame lies with everyone and starts with me," he said, adding that it was up to the BCCI to decide on his future. "Indian cricket is important, I'm not important."

"And yes, people can keep forgetting about it. I'm the same guy who got results in England as well, with a young team. And I'm sure you guys will forget very soon, because a lot of people keep talking about New Zealand (home series whitewash last year).

Pant vs head coach

India captain Rishabh Pant admitted the team had been outplayed. "It's disappointing. As a team we need to get better. They dominated the series, but at the same time you can't take cricket for granted at home," he said. Yet the head coach's post-match press conference was marked by contradictions. He refused to single out players but repeatedly emphasised the need for "tough characters" and hinted strongly that Pant had been "playing to the gallery" during India's collapse from 95 for 1 to 122 for 7 on the third afternoon. Pant's ill-judged charge at Jansen, resulting in a soft dismissal, was widely seen as the turning point.

Never thought I would be back in India in a million years
-Simon Harmer, South Africa bowler

You can't take cricket for granted, we need to get better
-Rishabh Pant, Stand-in skipper

The frailties

The defeat exposed severe technical and mental frailties in India's young batting unit, comprising several players with fewer than 15 Tests each. Debutants and newcomers, including Sai Sudharsan, Washington Sundar, Dhruv Jurel and Nitish Reddy, struggled to read South Africa's spin duo off the hand. Sudharsan's 14 off 139 balls, punctuated by multiple close calls, epitomised the inexperience. Off-spinner Simon Harmer exploited the conditions with far greater control than India's own bowlers.Ravindra Jadeja's fighting 53 was the lone bright spot in an otherwise dismal batting show. Poor back-foot play, inability to handle drift, and failure to soften the bottom hand were persistent themes in a performance that left the team looking "easily conquerable at home".

Hate the transition?

Gambhir acknowledged that the side was in transition, though he said he "hates the word". "Four or five batters in this top eight have played less than 15 Tests. They're learning on the job," he said, arguing that comparisons with the previous, more experienced line-up featuring Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma were "a wrong narrative". He also criticised players' tendency to shift focus to white-ball cricket. "People who do well in white-ball formats shouldn't forget what they have done in red-ball cricket," he said. Gambhir admitted scheduling had hampered preparation, India played a T20 series in Australia days before the Test opener, but insisted it was "not an excuse". Still, he said future planning needed better prioritisation.

Drop in ranking

The consequences of the defeat extend beyond pride. India slipped to fifth in the World Test Championship standings with a PCT of 48.15, severely denting their chances of reaching the WTC final.

They now sit below Pakistan, having won four, lost four and drawn one in the current cycle. Upcoming two-Test series in Sri Lanka next August and at home against New Zealand later in the year will be must-win contests. *—PTI*

INDIA'S BIGGEST DEFEATS

- 408 runs vs South Africa in 2025
- 333 runs vs Australia in 2017
- 337 runs vs Australia in 2007
- 341 runs vs Pakistan in 2006
- 342 runs vs Australia in 2004
- 329 runs vs SA in 1996

Former players question India's Test approach

Former players Anil Kumble and Venkatesh Prasad have questioned the Indian team's muddled approach, lack of stability and the increasing reliance on all-rounders in the wake of the 0-2 series loss to South Africa.
The Proteas inflicted a 408-run defeat on India in the second Test, their heaviest defeat by margin of runs, in Guwahati on Wednesday. Kumble was scathing about the constant chopping and changing method of head coach Gautam Gambhir, under whom India had lost a home series 0-3 to New Zealand last year, surrendered the Border-Gavaskar Trophy to Australia, and now gone down to South Africa at home for the first time in 25 years. Stalwarts have retired in the last 6-8 months, and when that happens, you need to have a vision and have a conversation as to what the team has to do," Kumble said.

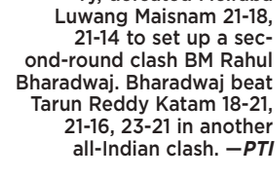


PHOTO: PTI

Syed Modi Int'l: Hooda, Srikanth move to 2nd round

MUMBAI, 26 NOV

Top seed Unnati Hooda and former champion Kidambi Srikanth notched comfortable wins to lead a host of Indians into the second round of the Syed Modi International Super 300 tournament in Lucknow on Wednesday. While Hooda overcame compatriot Aakarshi Kashyap 21-13, 21-18, Srikanth, who had reached the finals at Malaysia Masters early this year, produced a fluent performance to defeat Kavin Thangam 21-13, 21-10 at the Babu Banarasi Das Indoor Stadium. Seventh seed Rakshitha Sree Santhosh Ramraj opened her women's singles challenge with a confident 21-12, 21-14 win over Shreya Lele. Kiran George also advanced in the men's singles section, beating Israel's Daniil Dubovenko 21-17, 21-9, and will face Jason Gunawan of Hong Kong next. Priyanshu Rajawat, playing his first match in five months after recovering from a knee injury, defeated Meiraba Luwang Maisnam 21-18, 21-14 to set up a second-round clash BM Rahul Bharadwaj. Bharadwaj beat Tarun Reddy Katam 18-21, 21-16, 23-21 in another all-Indian clash. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Napoli fans honour Maradona with emotional tribute

NAPLES, 26 NOV

Napoli and its fans paid tribute to Diego Maradona on the fifth anniversary of his death. A video of Maradona was shown on the big screens in the stadium before Napoli's match against Qarabag in the Champions League on Tuesday, with the stadium announcer saying: "Napoli wants to remember you with a special video. Five years ago, the greatest of all time left us." The whole of the stadium chanted "Diego, Diego." In the 10th minute, Maradona's shirt number fans started chanting "there's only one Maradona" and singing songs about him, at the same time as they waved flags, scarves, and team shirts in his honor.*—PTI*

SYED MUSHTAQ ALI TROPHY

Smaran shines in Karnataka victory, Rajasthan drubs TN

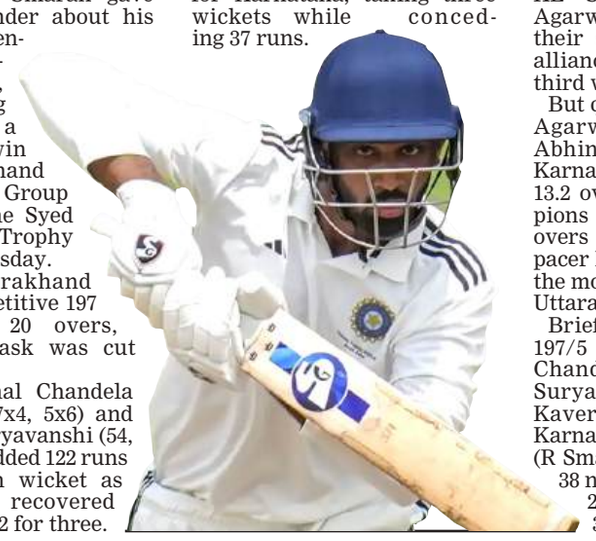
AHMEDABAD, 26 NOV

Ravichandran Smaran gave another reminder about his unlimited potential with a well-timed fifty, guiding Karnataka to a five-wicket win over Uttarakhand in the opening Group D match of the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy here on Wednesday.

Once Uttarakhand posted a competitive 197 for five in 20 overs, Karnataka's task was cut out.

Skipper Kunal Chandela (88, 49 balls, 7x4, 5x6) and Aanjaneya Suryavanshi (54, 36b, 5x4, 3x6) added 122 runs for the fourth wicket as Uttarakhand recovered from a shaky 32 for three.

Pacer Vidwath Kaverappa was the standout performer for Karnataka, taking three wickets while conceding 37 runs.



Karnataka slipped to 15 for two, losing Karun Nair and KL Shrijith, but Mayank Agarwal and Smaran took their side to 99 through an alliance of 84 runs for the third wicket.

But quick wickets of skipper Agarwal, Smaran, and Abhinav Manohar reduced Karnataka to 128 for five in 13.2 overs. The former champions needed 70 runs off 6.4 overs at that stage. Left-arm pacer Rajan Kumar (3/24) was the most successful bowler for Uttarakhand.

Brief scores: Uttarakhand: 197/5 in 20 overs (Kunal Chandela 88, Aanjaneya Suryavanshi 54; Vidwath Kaverappa 3/37) lost to Karnataka: 198/5 in 20 overs (R Smaran 67, Praveen Dubey 38 not out, Shubhang Hegde 29 not out; Rajan Kumar 3/24) by 5 wickets.*—PTI*

Javokhir Sindarov wins FIDE Chess World Cup

NAGPUR, 26 NOV

Luck seemed to continue to favour the seventh seed from China in the final on Wednesday against Javokhir Sindarov. But not for long: Wei's blunder gave the 19-year-old Uzbek a win in the second tie-break game and the World Cup. He is the youngest champion in World Cup history.

He is the youngest champion in World Cup history. In the first tie-break game at Resort Rio, Wei had made a terrible mistake with a pawn push on the king-side on the 30th move, putting Sindarov in a potentially winning position. But his opponent blundered in return straightaway with his own ill-judged pawn push on the same flank, and the game, which had reached a bishop-ending from Queen's Gambit Defence, petered out to a draw in 45 moves.Soon after the game, Sindarov's second showed him how he had missed a win. "I was very sad, but didn't want to think about it, as I had to play another game," he would admit later. "I thought if I got a chance like in the second, I would make use of it." And this was Wei's first defeat in the tournament; he had remained unbeaten in 27 games. And Sindarov had offered him a draw, which he had refused. *—PTI*

India clinched a 4-3 win against Malaysia

BRISBANE, 26 NOV

The Indian men's hockey team eked out a narrow 4-3 victory against hosts Malaysia at the Sultan Azlan Shah Cup here on Wednesday.

Selvam Karthi (7'), Sukhjeet Singh (21'), Amit Rohidas (39') and Sanjay (53') scored for India, while Faizal Saari (13'), Fitri Saari (36'), and Marhan Jalil (45') got on the scoresheet for Malaysia.

India started the game on the front foot, forcing the hosts back in their own half as they looked to assert themselves on the opposition.

They earned their first opportunity from a penalty corner at the foot of the three-minute mark and built a sustained period of pressure that eventually paid off.

A neat move from Sukhjeet Singh set up Selvam Karthi to score a tap-in, helping India take a 1-0 lead.

India will next face New Zealand on 27 November at 3:30 PM IST *—PTI*

1ST ODI VS SOUTH AFRICA

Cricketer Rohit Sharma waves as he arrives ahead of the first ODI cricket match of a series at Birsa Munda Airport, in Ranchi, on Wednesday
PHOTO: PTI

World Cup stars expected to fetch lucrative deals at WPL auction

NEW DELHI, 26 NOV

India's World Cup-winning stars Deepti Sharma, Kranti Gaud and Shree Charani are expected to bag high-value deals, while overseas bigwigs Laura Wolvaardt and Sophie Ecclestone are also likely to attract huge bids at the first-ever Women's Premier League mega auction here on Thursday.

A total of 277 players 194 Indian and 83 overseas will go under the hammer at the mega auction. The five teams are looking to fill a maximum of 73 slots, including 50 Indians and 23 overseas. The minimum squad size is 15, and the upper limit is 18.

The marquee set features India's Deepti and pacer Renuka Singh, New Zealand's Sophie Devine and Amelia Kerr, leading England spinner Ecclestone, Australians Alyssa Healy and Meg Lanning, and South Africa's Wolvaardt. Indian players are expected to draw strong interest after their historic ODI World Cup triumph earlier this month.

Batter Harleen Deol, who played for Gujarat Giants for the first three seasons, and all-rounder Sneh Rana are also in the fray.

Overseas stars, who did well at the World Cup, like Wolvaardt and Nadine de Klerk, Phoebe Litchfield and Alana King, along with experienced campaigners such as former Australian captain Lanning, are also expected to fetch lucrative deals. Australian Litchfield is a star in the making, and franchises are expected to go after her along with fellow opener Georgia Voll and pacer Kim Garth.

Having retained just one player, UP Warriorz have the maximum purse Rs 14.5 crore going into the auction, while Delhi Capitals have the least in pocket Rs 5.70 crore. Mumbai Indians and Delhi Capitals, who retained five players each, will not have any Right To Match option available.

Four associate players Theertha Satish and Esha Oza (both UAE), Tara Norris (USA) and Thipatcha Putthawong (Thailand) are also part of the auction list. The tournament is expected to begin on 7 January.*—PTI*

WON'T MISS WORLD CUP OPENER

Ronaldo gets probation for a red card

GENEVA, 26 NOV

Cristiano Ronaldo will likely avoid missing any Portugal games at the World Cup despite his red card in a qualifying game for elbowing an Ireland opponent.

FIFA published a disciplinary verdict that imposed a three-game ban, which judged Ronaldo's action as "violent conduct" or "serious foul play," but with two of those games deferred for a one-year probation period.

Ronaldo served a mandatory one-game ban when Portugal played its final qualifying game last week a 9-1 win over Armenia that sealed its place at the World Cup in North America.

The superstar had been expected to be banned for at least one more game and start what will be his record sixth World Cup on the sidelines.

Cristiano Ronaldo
PHOTO: X/@CRISTIANO

FIFA cited its disciplinary rules that allow for parts of a sanction to be probationary, though it is rare in cases of a three-game ban for two of them to be deferred. In two cases judged by FIFA this month, players from Armenia and Burundi were banned for three games after getting red cards for acts of aggression in World Cup qualifying games, and neither got a reduction on probation.

"If Cristiano Ronaldo commits another infringement of a similar nature and gravity during the probationary period," FIFA said in a statement, then the remaining two games will be activated.

FIFA has disciplinary authority over national-team games, and Portugal is scheduled to play two friendly matches in March, then likely one or two warm-up games in late May or June. The World Cup, co-hosted by the United States, Canada, and Mexico, starts 11 June.

Ronaldo swung an arm and struck Ireland defender Dara O'Shea with an elbow during a 2-0 loss in Dublin two weeks ago. *—PTI*

Mahindra Racing commits to Formula E's Gen4 era

MUMBAI, 26 NOV

Mahindra Racing on Wednesday committed to the Gen4 era of Formula E after years of deliberation, ensuring the presence of the Indian manufacturer in the electric racing series until 2030.

Mahindra Racing, part of the FIA-sanctioned World Championship series since the inaugural season in 2014–15, showed drastic improvement in the previous season to finish fourth in the standings.

Having committed to Formula E until 2030, the team can now put all its energies into the upcoming season, marking the end of the Gen3 era. *—PTI*